THOMAS À KEMPIS

F. R. CRUISE, M.D.

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THOMAS À KEMPIS

NOTES OF A VISIT TO THE SCENES IN WHICH HIS LIFE WAS SPENT, WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF THE EXAMINATION OF HIS RELICS

BY

FRANCIS RICHARD CRUISE, M.D.

(UNIV. DUBLIN)

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE KING AND QUEEN'S COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS IN IRELAND, CONSULTING PHYSICIAN TO THE MATER MISERICORDIÆ HOSPITAL, DUBLIN, MEMBER OF SENATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN AND OF THE ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, MEMBER OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY, ETC.

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PREFACE.

When I began to write out the notes of my visit to the localities in which Thomas à Kempis spent his life, I had no idea that the result would grow in length and breadth to any considerable extent. Had such an apprehension crossed my mind I should have abandoned the project at once, both from consciousness of my own unfitness for any literary effort, and also from the dread of inflicting an additional torture on the book-plagued public.

However, as the notes were being cast into shape, a page was added here, two or more there, then a something further to make the rest intelligible, and thus the sketch has grown, until at last I find myself surrounded by a very formidable amount of manuscript.

Not without many serious misgivings, I have ultimately decided to venture its publication, and for this simple reason.

Profoundly interesting as the subject is, and prolific as its literature has become, I am not aware of any book in English, written from a Catholic point of

view, in which the life and work of Thomas à Kempis, with the history of his times and surroundings, are placed within reach of the public.*

I do not intend by this observation to underrate the erudite works of the Rev. S. Kettlewell.† I deeply respect his earnest religious spirit, his appreciation of Thomas à Kempis, and his painstaking research, but I cannot help feeling that the strong Anglican bias which he manifests throughout must render his writings distasteful to Catholic readers.

There is something startling, and not a little grotesque, in finding an attempt made to establish a parallel between the lives of Gerard Groot and John Wyclif, and in the effort to represent Thomas à Kempis as a potential precursor of Martin Luther and his so-called Reformation!

It appears strange that so many forget that reformation of life and deformation of dogma are not alone different things, but are separated by an abyss which can never be spanned.‡ On the whole it seems to me that a less fantastic version of the subject may be

* The best short essay on the subject in English with which I am acquainted, is that of the Rev. A. J. Thebaud, S.J., published in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*. Philadelphia: Hardy and Mahony, October, 1883.

† The Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi, by the Rev. S. Kettlewell. London: Rivingtons, 1877. Also Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life, by the same author. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1882.

‡ Appendix A.

of use, and therefore, in the hope of enabling Catholic readers to find in English a short, and I think truthful, account of Thomas à Kempis, I have committed this little essay to the press.

It is right that I should, from the outset, disavow all claim to originality. The book is a mere digest of what I have learned in a somewhat extended course of study, and I have endeavoured to give references conscientiously to the sources from which I draw.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance I have received from many friends in preparing this essay, and in getting it through the press. I am indebted to my brother-in-law, Mr. Butler, for its general supervision, and for the correction of the proof-sheets. Without his ever-ready aid, accurate knowledge of the subject, and judicious criticism, I should never have been able to complete my undertaking. I am further indebted to my niece, Miss MacDermott, and my daughter, Miss Cruise, for many translations from French and German made to save my time; to Mr. Louis Ely O'Carroll for his aid in preparing a digest of Dom Wolfsgruber's work; to Mr. Rudersdorff for making some translations from the Dutch, and for correcting others; and to a friend, who wishes to be anonymous, for the help he has given me in working out the parallelisms which exist between *The Imitation of Christ* and the works of St. Bernard.

Probably very few can be as conscious as I am of the many faults and deficiencies of the book, but the life of a physician in active practice is, to say the least, not favourable to literary work, as the only leisure he can command is made up of the spare half-hours he steals while on very anxious rounds. Should I, despite my difficulties and numerous shortcomings, succeed in the humblest degree in awaking in others the deep and reverent interest which I myself feel in Thomas à Kempis and his writings, my utmost ambition will be satisfied, and my labour of love well rewarded.

F. R. C.

93, Merrion Square, Dublin,
1887.

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THOMAS À KEMPIS.

PART I.

As a pilgrimage to the localities wherein Thomas à Kempis spent his long and holy life may appear a somewhat unusual undertaking, I think it right to preface my account thereof by a short statement of the circumstances which led me to make that most interesting journey.

From boyhood I was fascinated by the power and beauty of the wondrous book, *The Imitation of Christ*, and even in my school-days at Clongowes Wood my curiosity was roused concerning its authorship. I remember still, as though it were but yesterday, the occasion upon which my beloved master, the Rev. Joseph Lentaigne, S.J., first laid before me the story of the controversy anent its paternity, illustrating with his lucid mind and rich classical lore the main features of the dispute. His studies, always profound and accurate, had led him to believe that Thomas à Kempis was in truth the author of the book. As years went by my interest in the subject never diminished, and

in moments of leisure I read all I could find to bear upon it; and I may truthfully add that in the study of the book, and of the life of its gifted saintly author, I have found many hours of rest and happiness, amidst the wearisome labours of a busy, anxious life.

Pondering over this fascinating theme, I came to perceive that three distinct phases of the subject presented themselves;—

Firstly, the examination of the book itself;

Secondly, the history of the life of the man who, I am led to believe, really composed it—namely, Thomas à Kempis; and

Thirdly, the history of the controversy which has been raised concerning its authorship.

The present occasion is manifestly unsuited for an exhaustive treatment of these topics; yet it is impossible to explain the deep interest with which I visited the scenes wherein Thomas à Kempis spent his life, without touching, though briefly, each of the foregoing aspects of the subject. I shall consider them in the order set forth above.

Nearly five hundred years ago, in the first third of the fifteenth century—one of the gloomiest epochs in the history of the Church—a brilliant holy light rose up amid the darkness; a beacon of hope and guidance, whereof the lustre has never faded from those days up to the present. That beacon was the wondrous little book—*The Imitation of Christ.*

Fontenelle did not outstep the truth when he designated it as the most beautiful work that ever

came from the hand of man, for, as we know, the Holy Scripture came from God. Beyond doubt, *The Imitation* most perfectly reflects the light which Jesus Christ brought down from heaven to earth, and truthfully portrays the highest Christian philosophy. When our Divine Saviour preached the Sermon on the Mount, He held up as the characteristics of His followers—Perfect Humility, Poverty of spirit, Purity of heart, Meekness, Sorrow for sin, Forgiveness of injuries, and Peace and Joy in the midst of tribulation and persecution. Nowhere else do we find these doctrines so incisively and persuasively taught as in the unpretending little volume so familiar to us all. Familiar, I may truly say, because it is the handbook of every Catholic from childhood; and very few Christians, having pretensions to liberal education, fail to make its acquaintance sooner or later.

The tradition of ages assigns the authorship of this priceless volume to a certain Augustinian Canon Regular, Thomas à Kempis, and by-and-by it will be seen with what just and solid reason. That its authorship has been disputed, and must remain open to captious discussion, is certain, for reasons which will appear; but it is beyond question that the claims of Thomas à Kempis stand far above those of all other candidates, real or imaginary, and vastly exceed those upon which the majority of similar cases of doubt are decided. Later I shall return to this subject.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to speak definitely of the effect of *The Imitation of Christ* on all

readers; still, I think it will be universally conceded that no thoughtful mind can realize its contents without experiencing a profound and lasting impression.

I know not that there exists a more graphic or feeling description of the power exercised by this book, than that given by the celebrated Laharpe. Although a partisan of the French Revolutionary movement, and a thorough Voltairian, he had given offence to the parties in authority, and in 1794 was cast into prison. During his incarceration he turned his thoughts to God, studied the Bible and *The Imitation*, and finally became a devout Catholic. I shall here translate his description of his first acquaintance with *The Imitation of Christ*.

"I was in my prison cell, alone and profoundly "sad. For some days past I had studied attentively "the Gospels, the Psalms, and other spiritual works. "A mighty change was thus by swift gradations "wrought within my mind. Already the gift of faith "was restored to me, and a ray of heavenly light "illumined my soul, which had lain in darkness. "Full forty years had I wandered in the paths of "error, and behold, at my feet yawned a deep abyss, "disclosed by the light which penetrated my soul. "The evil appeared irremediable, and my position "completely debarred me from the helps which "Religion can afford. Uprose before me on the one "hand a vision of my past life, seen by the light of "Truth; on the other hand a vision of death, in the "guise it then wore for so many of my compatriots,

"and wherein I expected to meet it. The priest no "longer ascended the scaffold to console the victim "awaiting the death-stroke; he ascended it only to "die. Oppressed by these images of desolation which "encompassed me, a chill of sorrow crept over my "heart, and from its depths I poured forth to God, "with Whom I was but lately reconciled and Whose "infinite mercy I had yet to learn, these words of "supplication: '*What wouldst Thou have me do? What* "'*is to become of me?*'

"On my table lay *The Imitation of Christ*, and I "remembered having heard that in this admirable "book are to be found clear answers to all difficulties "which can agitate the soul. Opening it at hazard, I "lighted at once on a passage which arrested my "attention—'*Here am I; for thou hast called me.*'* I "read no more. A sudden and mighty revulsion of "feeling, which defies description, and which I shall "remember to the end of my life, took place within "my heart. Falling prostrate on the ground, bathed "in tears, I gave vent to smothered cries and exclama- "tions, mingled with sobs. I felt my heart expand, and "filled with consolation, although nigh unto bursting. "Overwhelmed by the torrent of ideas and feelings, "I wept long and bitterly; and the only recollection

* 1 Kings iii. 5, 9. Imitation of Christ, book iii. chap. xxi. The English version of the Imitation of Christ used is that published by Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., London. I may add that in the present work I do not attempt to quote the references, Scriptural and other, which we constantly find in the Imitation, hoping to do so on a future occasion.

"I now have of the momentous phase through which "my soul then passed, is the knowledge that never "before or since have I experienced emotion so violent, "and yet so unspeakably sweet; the words '*Behold I* "'*am here*' echoing unceasingly in my heart, awakening "its faculties and moving it to the uttermost depths." *

It is needless, and might even prove wearisome, to heap up the commendations bestowed universally by Catholics upon this spiritual treasure. I pass by the words of Sir Thomas More, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis Borgia, St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, Baronius, Bellarmin, St. Francis de Sales, Corneille, Bossuet, Joseph de Maistre, and others equally illustrious, and sum up all in the one fact, that when St. Ignatius of Loyola undertook to lay down the rules of the great Order which he founded, he selected two books to guide him—the New Testament and *The Imitation of Christ*.†

But, reverence for *The Imitation* and appreciation of its holy wisdom are not by any means confined to Catholics. I might fill pages in proof of this, quoting Leibnitz, Wesley, Samuel Johnson, Milman, De Quincey, Canon Farrar, and a host of others;

* See preface to De Lamennais' translation of the Imitation of Christ (Tours: Mame et fils, Éditeurs, 1877).

† See Thomas à Kempis, ceu Summa Theologiæ Mysticæ, ad Exercitia Spiritualia S. Ignatii accomodata (Rev. G. Heserus, Monachii: 1793); also Concordance de l'Imitation de Jésus Christ et des Exercices Spirituels de S. Ignace, par R. P. Mercier, S.J. (Paris: Oudin, 1885); also Introduction sur la Vie de l'admirable Thomas à Kempis, par Père Marcel Bouix, S.J., prefixed to translation of the Imitation of Christ (Paris: Régis Ruffet & Cie., 1864).

however, for the sake of brevity, I shall confine myself to two remarkable illustrations.

The gifted authoress of *The Mill on the Floss*, in her picture of the heroine, Maggie Tulliver, most feelingly portrays the process whereby the sorely tried girl learned from à Kempis to turn to God, and to find supreme content in renunciation of herself; the renunciation that remains sorrow, though a sorrow willingly borne. This sacrifice was for her the key to happiness, just as it alone can be for all of us:—

"I suppose that is the reason why the small, old-
"fashioned book, for which you need only pay sixpence
"at a bookstall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter
"waters into sweetness; while expensive sermons and
"treatises newly issued leave all things as they were before.

"It was written down by a hand that waited for
"the heart's prompting; it is the chronicle of a solitary
"hidden anguish, struggle, trust, and triumph—not
"written on velvet cushions to teach endurance to
"those who are treading with bleeding feet on the
"stones. And so it remains to all time a lasting
"record of human needs and human consolations; the
"voice of a brother, who, ages ago, felt and suffered
"and renounced—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge
"gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and
"long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from
"ours—but under the same silent far-off heavens, and
"with the same passionate desires, the same strivings,
"the same failures, the same weariness." *

* The Mill on the Floss, by George Eliot, book iv. chap. iii.

Again, but recently we all mourned the tragic fate of General Gordon, the pure-souled man, the lover of the poor and the afflicted, the true hero, faithful unto death. It is well known that he devoutly revered *The Imitation*, and studied daily in its pages the virtues that were reflected in his life.

Let us pause a little, to think and see wherein lies the secret of the extraordinary influence of *The Imitation of Christ*. It needs but scant discernment to understand its power. In truth the book, though not directly inspired, is but the mouthpiece of Holy Scripture, and from beginning to end breathes nothing but the Word of God, and His ardent love, adapted to our countless necessities by one who knew the human heart to its innermost depths, and sympathized in all its woes.

One special characteristic of all the works of à Kempis is their wealth of Biblical illustration. In many places, too numerous to quote, he earnestly commends the reading of the Sacred Scripture. As examples, I may mention three striking instances.

In the *Manuale Parvulorum*, or Manual for those commencing the spiritual life, he says—"Christ speaks "to thee in each and every word of God, in every "chapter of Holy Writ; for whatsoever thou dost "read, write, and understand of the Sacred Scripture, "is the consolation of the faithful soul in tribulation, "the remedy against the poison of the enemy of man-

"kind, ever recalling the erring soul to its eternal "Lord in Paradise." *

Again, in the *Doctrinale Juvenum*, or Instruction for the Young, he quotes Ecclesiasticus—"'*My son*, "'*from thy youth up receive instruction, and even to* "'*thy gray hairs thou shalt find wisdom.*'" Adding, "Therefore, above all other knowledge learn to read "the Sacred Scripture, to understand it fully, to "believe it firmly, to live justly and well, in order "that, by the Mercy of God, thou mayest happily "attain to life eternal." †

Lastly, in the preface to the *Soliloquy of the Soul*, he writes—"I entreat thee also, O Holy Father, give "me, the least of Thy servants, time and opportunity "for tarrying in the rich pastures of the Holy Scrip- "ture, which are and will be to me the sweetest "delights, until the day of Eternity shall dawn, and "the shadow of Mortality shall sink down." ‡

These quotations, characteristic as they are, may be taken as illustrating the spirit of à Kempis' writings, which, as appears both from *The Imitation of Christ* and his other treatises, are woven around a pervading basis of Scripture.

I have endeavoured to count the Biblical quotations

* See Works of Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii. Of the numerous editions none is better than that in three volumes (usually bound up in one), edited by Henry Sommalius, S.J., and published by Nut, of Antwerp, in 1607. See also translation of Manuale Parvulorum, by F. R. C., chap. vi. Gill and Son. Dublin: 1884.

† Doctrinale Juvenum, chap. i., Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

‡ Soliloquium Animæ, Prologus, Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

and allusions in *The Imitation of Christ*, and, even with my very imperfect knowledge, I have verified about six hundred. The other works of à Kempis are equally rich in Scriptural lore. Taking, for illustration, some of those most familiarly known, we find—in *The Three Tabernacles*, two hundred and thirty references; in *The Soliloquy of the Soul*, one hundred and fifty; in the *Valley of Lilies*, over a hundred; in the *Garden of Roses*, forty-seven. Among the less familiar works, such as *The Manual for Beginners*, we find over twenty Scriptural allusions; in *The Instruction for the Young*, about fifteen; and, I may add, a like proportion in the remaining ascetical works, such as the *Discipline of the Cloister*, *The Meditations*, *Sermons to the Novices and the Brethren*, and so forth.

The Scriptural learning of Thomas à Kempis thus evidenced throughout his writings is easily understood. It is well known that he devoted the greater part of twelve years to copying the Bible for the use of his convent, and assuredly his works show how profitably that time was spent.

However, above and beyond mere learning, he possessed special attributes which render him pre-eminent as a guide for souls; notably, his ardent love of God, his charity towards others, and his perfect knowledge of human nature. The perspicuity, wondrous judgment, and loving tenderness with which he uses his lore, equally astound and edify. What often seems mystical and obscure in Holy Writ shines out clear and practical under his magic touch, and his

exposition of every topic reaches alike the heart of the humblest and of the most learned. So deftly does he touch each point, and probe each wound and sore that cankers the human heart, so faithfully does he portray each trial, struggle, and agony which any one has undergone, sympathetically offering the healing balm, as one who had suffered and knew how to pity and help, that all must feel in reading his words that this master of the spiritual life has held up to every one of us the mirror of saving truth, to show us how we err, and how we may amend and conform our lives to the Great Model laid down by our Divine Lord for the guidance of those who are willing, at all cost, to take up His cross and follow Him.

In this one book, as Dean Milman says, "was "gathered and concentered all that was elevating, "passionate, profoundly pious, in all the older mystics," and no one ever could resist its power, "its short, "quivering sentences, which went at once to the "heart."*

I do not for a moment pretend to suggest that Thomas à Kempis has made the work of salvation an easy one—far from it; he knew our fallen state too well—but he certainly has taught us how to find the path to heaven. The rest lies with our own free will. *"Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the "gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, "and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow*

* Milman's Latin Christianity, vol. ix., pp. 161, 162. John Murray. London: 1867.

"*is the gate, and strait is the way, that leadeth to life;* "*and few there are that find it.*" * "*For many are* "*called, but few are chosen.*" † Withal, in *The Imitation of Christ* Thomas à Kempis has taught us *practically* how to strive for heaven, and to live in the assured hope that we shall gain it if we are found fighting—

> "To that alone thy choice and wishes bend,
> How best in life thou may'st thy journey spend,
> How best in death thou may'st thy journey end." ‡

It is not my intention at present, even if I were in anywise capable of such a task, to attempt an analysis of this extraordinary book. I think it is better for each earnest student of the way of salvation to take the volume and study it. Let him do so, pencil in hand, noting, as he reads, its application to himself. Let him read it again and again, over and over. Each time he will find beauties which never struck him before, great truths which lay hidden and lost, just dawning as his mind opens for their reception. Pondering over the First Book, he will find himself gradually but certainly raised from the things of this world; in other words, purified. The Second Book will carry him on to the knowledge of the internal life and its advantages; that is, to the state of illumination. In the Fourth Book he will find the reward of perfect union with his Creator in the Holy Sacrament of the

* Matt. vii. 13, 14. † Matt. xxii. 14.

‡ The End of Man, p. 9, by Albany J. Christie, S.J. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. London: 1886.

Altar; and in the Third Book he will realize the interior consolation given to those who, as faithful disciples, yield themselves up to familiar converse with their Lord and Master.*

Although I dare not venture myself to offer an analysis of this masterpiece of mystic spirituality, yet I cannot forego referring, at some length, to one description of it which has lately appeared, and which I believe to be the most beautiful and truthful in any language. I allude to the *résumé* of *The Imitation of Christ*, contained in the last six chapters of the essay on *Culture of the Spiritual Sense*, by Brother Azarias, of the Christian Brothers, President of Rockhill College, Maryland. This gifted writer seems to have fathomed the book to its uttermost depths, and to have received an inspired gift of eloquence in setting forth to his pupils its worth and beauty. I shall quote freely from this remarkable essay—first, because it is so true and so grand; and, secondly, in the hope that those who read the following extracts may be induced to study the original.†

Impressing upon his youthful listeners, with earnestness peculiarly his own, the vital importance of culti-

* I may observe that the order in which I have here quoted the four books of the Imitation of Christ is that adopted by Thomas à Kempis, as may be seen in his autograph manuscript in the Burgundian Library in Brussels (No. 5855–5861). See facsimile of same, published by Elliot Stock (London: 1879), with preface by M. Charles Ruelens, of Brussels.

† Culture of the Spiritual Sense, by Brother Azarias. Steigel & Co. New York: 1884.

vating the Spiritual Sense, he bursts forth into these words :—

"But I need not go beyond yourselves for further "reason why you should cultivate the Spiritual Sense. "You now look out upon the world decked in all the "roseate hues that your young imaginations weave; "your fancies filled with schemes of ambition; bent "upon achieving success in some one or other walk of "life, you are eager, even to impatience, to enter upon "your course; and you may think it a loss of time, a "diverting you from your main purpose, to enter "seriously upon the cultivation of this Spiritual Sense. "On the contrary, you will find in it a help. The "present is only a passing phase of your existence. "Youth soon fades and strength decays; and as shock "after shock in your struggle through life demolishes "one after another the air-castles which you so long "and so laboriously constructed, you will more and "more feel the necessity of ceasing to lean upon "broken reeds and of looking within your soul's "interior for an abiding comfort. And if you find "there but emptiness, even as you have found hollow-"ness and deceit without, you will grow hardened and "cynical. But if, on the other hand, you have learned "to commune with yourself and to make your soul's "interior the guest-chamber in which to entertain the "Divine Word—the Emmanuel dwelling within you— "in Him you will find renewed strength to fight your "battles with the world, to help you in trouble, to "soothe you in pain, and to console you in sorrow and

"affliction. And so, in cultivating the Spiritual Sense "you are also educating yourselves up to the larger "views of life, and learning the great lesson of patience "and forbearance.

"And there is another moment—a supreme moment "—when the language of the soul, the sentiment of "piety and relish for Divine things, the habit of sweet "communion with your Saviour, will be to you a "blessing and a comfort. It is when you are prostrate "on the pallet of sickness, and life is ebbing fast, and "the helpless body seems to be sinking down abysmal "depths with the weight of its own inertness. From "time to time the soul's flickering flame lights up into "a sudden blaze of consciousness and animation, as if "wrestling hard to be free. Dear friends and near "relatives may be there, hovering around you, minister- "ing to your every want and gratifying your least "desire. But in the questioning look with which they "watch the face of your physician, and the anxious "glances that they cast upon you, and the subdued "whisperings in which they speak their worst fears, "you learn that you are beyond all human aid. Fainter "flickers the vital spark and weaker grows the frame, "and loving faces look upon you with a more wistful "look, and loving forms pass before you with a more "stealthy tread; but they are to you as though they "were not. Fainter and feebler you become, and the "world recedes farther and farther from you, and those "you love so dearly seem afar off, and the distance "between you and them grows more and more. You

"feel yourself sinking into unconsciousness, and you "know that your next waking will be in another world, "beyond the reach of everything in life around which "your heart-strings are twined. The last rites of the "Church are administered to you, and as your senses "are about shutting out for ever the sights and sounds "of this world, you catch as the faint echo of a far-off "voice, the words of the priest, 'Go forth, O Christian "'soul!' Happy will you be in that dread hour, if, "when you appear before the Divine Searcher of "hearts, the pure light of the Word penetrates no "corner that you did not already know, and reveals no "sin that has not already been repented of and atoned "for. Thrice happy will you be when you meet the "Divine Presence face to face, if, having cultivated "the Spiritual Sense and acquired a relish for Divine "truths, you find that you are familiar with the language "of love and adoration, of praise and thanksgiving, "which should be yours for all eternity, and that you "are not as a stranger in a strange land, but rather as "a child welcomed home to his Father's House after "a life-long exile. Wise indeed were it that we all of "us learn in time this language, which must be ours "throughout eternity.

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"There are two manuals of instruction and initia- "tion into this mystical language of the soul, which "I would especially recommend to you. The one is "the Book of the Gospels. You know its contents; "but you must never weary of its perusal. You will

"always find in it something new. It treats of a "subject that never grows old. We cannot hear "enough of Him, the Meek One, walking among men "and doing good wherever He went. Open the Book "reverently and lovingly, and let the light of His "Blessed Face shine out upon you from its inspired "pages. Sweetly and simply it traces His footsteps; "in loving accents it recounts the words He spoke, the "deeds He did, the miracles He wrought. It reveals "the God-Man. It tells of His sufferings from the "manger in Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary. It "tells of His patience and forbearance, of His humility "and modesty, of His compassion for sinners and His "hatred for hypocrisy. His words are as balm to the "bruised, rest to the weary, peace to the restless, joy "to the sorrowing, and light to those groping in the "dark. They penetrate all hearts because they flow "from a heart loving man with an infinite love. Our "familiarity with them from our childhood up may lead "us to lose sight of their infinite worth. The sublimest "hymn that was ever poured forth from the lips of "man in prayer and the praise of his Creator is the "*Our Father*. In its grandeur it rises from the lowest "depths of man's nothingness to the throne of Infinite "Majesty; in its pathos it searches the heart, touches "its feebleness and exposes its wants, with the sim- "plicity and tenderness of a child leaning upon a fond "and merciful father. It is at once supplication, ex- "hortation, instruction, praise and worship. Again, the "Sermon on the Mount embodies all that there is of

"good and perfect in moral thought, moral word, and "moral work in the whole life of humanity. And so "I might go on enumerating the beauties and sub- "limities of this marvellous Book and never tire, never "get done. Its beauty is untold; its wisdom is un- "fathomable. They are the beauty and the wisdom of "Him who is the ideal of all loveliness and the source "of all wisdom.

"That other book which I would recommend to "you has garnered a few of the lessons revealed in "these Gospels and bound them together in rich and "ripe sheaves of thought. A rare harvesting indeed "is this book. It is known in every tongue and its "praises have been sung in every note. Next to its "original and source it is the most popular book ever "written. I speak of *The Imitation of Christ.*

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"It is interesting to study the literary structure of "*The Imitation*, and note the traces of authorship "running through it. We will glance at it for a "moment. First of all and above all, the book is "saturated through and through with the Sacred Scrip- "tures. You can scarcely read a sentence that does "not recall some passage, now in the Old, now in the "New Testament. It reflects their pure rays like an "unbroken mirror. To transcribe the Bible had been "a labour of love for the author. . . . Echoes of beauti- "ful passages from the spiritual writers that went before "him reverberate through the pages of this book which "is none the less original. The author drew from

"St. Gregory the Great. St. Bernard seems to have "been a special favourite. So was St. Francis of Assisi. "He drew from St. Thomas. He drew from St. "Bonaventura. He even drew from the Roman "Missal. He also lays the pagan classics under con- "tribution. He quotes Aristotle. He quotes Ovid. "He quotes Seneca. And there are some remark- "able coincidences in expression between himself and "Dante. He even quotes the popular sayings of his "day. In a word, as with the poet, whatever love "inspired, no matter the speech in which the voice "came, he wrote at her dictation.

"In both language and spirit the book exhales the "atmosphere of Mysticism in which it was conceived "and written. Its very terms are the terms of Mys- "ticism. And if we would understand the book "thoroughly we must make tangible to ourselves this "mystical state. In the human soul, there is and has "been at all times a strong and irrepressible yearning "after the higher spiritual things of the unseen "Universe. It is not given to all to attain its dizziest "heights. It may not even be well for all to aim "thereat. But it is something to be proud of, to know "that our humanity has reached that state in its elect "few. And what is the mystical state ?—It is a striving "of the soul after union with the Divinity. It is, "therefore, a turning away from sin and all that could "lead to sin, and a raising up of the soul above all "created things, 'transcending every ascent of every "'holy height, and leaving behind all Divine lights

"'and sounds and heavenly discoursings, and passing "'into that Darkness where He is who is above all "'things.' In this state the soul is passively conscious "that she lives and breathes in the Godhead, and asks "neither to speak nor think. Her whole happiness is "to be. She has found absolute Goodness, absolute "Truth, and absolute Beauty; she knows it and feels "it and rests content in the knowledge. She seeks "nothing beyond. She has left far behind her all "practical and speculative habits. Her faculties are "hushed in holy awe at the nearness of the Divine "Presence. Memory has ceased to minister to her; "Fancy and Imagination walk at a distance and in "silence, fearing to obtrude themselves upon the Un-"imagined Infinite; Reason is prostrate and abashed "before the Incomprehensible; Understanding remains "lulled in adoration before the Unknowable. She is "overshadowed by the intense splendor of the Divine "Glory, and filled—thrilled through and through—with "the dread Presence, she is raised above the plane of "our common human feelings and sympathies into the "highest sphere of thought and love and adoration "attainable in this life, and is thus given a foretaste of "Heaven. In this state the soul apprehends with "clearness mysteries that are entirely beyond her "ordinary power of conception.*

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"Thomas à Kempis knows no other way by which

* See the first four chapters of the essay, De Elevatione Mentis, Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii. [F. R. C.]

"to lead the Christian soul to the heights of perfection "and union with the Divinity than the rugged road "trodden by Jesus. The opening words of *The Imita-* "*tion* strike the key-note with no uncertain tone: '"*He* "'"*that followeth Me walketh not in darkness,*" *saith* "'*the Lord. These are the words of Christ, by which* "'*we are taught to imitate His life and manners, if we* "'*would be truly enlightened and be delivered from all* "'*blindness of heart. . . . Whosoever would fully and* "'*feelingly understand the words of Christ, must en-* "'*deavour to conform his life wholly to the life of* "'*Christ.*' In this manner does the author give us "purely and simply, without gloss or comment, the "spirituality of the Gospel. He does not flatter human "nature. He merely points out the narrow and "rugged road to Calvary. The 'royal way of the "'holy Cross' is the only safe way: '*Go where thou* "'*wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find* "'*a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the* "'*way of the holy Cross.*' And here the pious author, "in descanting on the merits of the Cross, becomes "truly poetical: '*In the Cross is salvation; in the* "'*Cross is life; in the Cross is protection against our* "'*enemies; in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweet-* "'*ness; in the Cross is strength of mind; in the Cross* "'*is joy of spirit; in the Cross is the height of virtue;* "'*in the Cross is the perfection of sanctity. There is no* "'*salvation of the soul, no hope of everlasting life, but in* "'*the Cross. Take up, therefore, thy cross and follow* "'*Jesus, and thou shalt go into life everlasting.*' Thus

"it is that in the language of à Kempis the Cross "symbolizes all Christian virtue; and bearing one's "trials and troubles with patience and resignation is "walking on the royal road of the Cross.

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"For the student, *The Imitation* is laden with "beautiful lessons. The pious author must have had "his own scholars in his mind's eye in penning many "a passage. He never tires of recalling to them that "there is something better than vain words and dry "disputations. '*Surely great words do not make a man "'holy and just. . . . Many words do not satisfy the "'soul. . . . Meddle not with things too high for thee; "'but read such things as may rather yield compunction "'to thy heart, than occupation to thy head.*' He dis- "tinguishes between the reading that goes home to "the heart, and that which is merely a matter of "occupation. The distinction is an important one. It "defines the functions of the Spiritual Sense.

"Again, the author lays down the conditions under "which study may be pursued with advantage. He "shows the greater responsibility attached to human "knowledge, and counsels the students to be humble. "'*The more thou knowest, and the better thou under- "'standest, the more strictly shalt thou be judged, unless "'thy life be also the more holy. Be not therefore "'elated in thine own mind because of any art or science, "'but rather let the knowledge given thee make thee "'afraid. If thou thinkest that thou understandest and "'knowest much; yet know that there be many more*

"'*things which thou knowest not.*' Bear in mind that "the author is not simply inculcating the modesty and "diffidence that belong to every well-educated person, "and that may accompany great intellectual pride. He "goes deeper, and insists upon true humility. '*If* "'*thou wilt know and learn anything profitably, desire* "'*to be unknown and little esteemed. This is the highest* "'*and most profitable lesson: truly to know and despise* "'*ourselves.*'

"The pious author is no less earnest in counselling "the student to be simple and pure. '*By two wings* "'*a man is lifted up from things earthly, namely, by* "'*Simplicity and Purity. Simplicity ought to be in* "'*our intention; Purity in our affections. Simplicity* "'*doth tend towards God; Purity doth apprehend and* "'*taste Him. . . . If thy heart were sincere and upright,* "'*then would every creature be unto thee a living mirror,* "'*and a book of holy doctrine. There is no creature so* "'*small and abject, that it representeth not the goodness* "'*of God. If thou wert inwardly good and pure, then* "'*wouldst thou be able to see and understand all things* "'*well without impediment. A pure heart penetrateth* "'*heaven and hell.*' Doctrine as beautiful as it is true. "Only to the clean of heart is it given to see God in "heaven. Only to the clean of heart is it also given "to recognize the splendor of His glory in the beautiful "things that He has created. The poetry and chivalry "of the Middle Ages vie with each other in extolling "this pearl among the virtues. Percival's purity of "heart wins for him the rare privilege of beholding the

"Holy Grail. Launcelot fails in his quest because of "his sin. Sir Galahad's virgin heart makes him tenfold "strong against his foes :

> "My good blade carves the casques of men,
> My tough lance thrusteth sure,
> My strength is as the strength of ten,
> *Because my heart is pure.*"

"The philosophy of *The Imitation* may be summed "up in two words. It is a philosophy of Light and "a philosophy of Life : the Light of Truth and the "Life of Grace. Both the one and the other, à "Kempis seeks in their source and fountain-head. "He does not separate them. It is only in the union "of both that man attains his philosophic ideal. Vain "words and dry speculations, scholastic wrangling and "religious controversy, may furnish food for man's "vanity, but they are unable to nourish his soul. And "so, the devout author, with Clement of Alexandria, "with Augustine and Aquinas, ascends to the Incarnate "Word—the Divine Logos—as the source whence "proceeds all truth, both natural and revealed, for the "criterion and the ideal of human knowledge. Here "he finds unity and harmony. And if human opinions "oppose one another, those alone can be true which "are compatible with the revealed and certain dogmas "of the Church. Therefore, he begs the student to "hush the clash of systems, and seek above and beyond "all system and all caviling the truth pure and simple "as it emanates from the Godhead. In his day the "clashing of scholastic opinion was loud and fierce,

"and the din of the Schools so filled the air that he "steps aside from his usual course of ignoring the "issues and contests of the outside world and asks: "'What matters it to us about genera and species?'

"Thomas à Kempis has in his book no place for "these strifes. In a philosophic poem, which is only "less sublime than that with which St. John opens his "Gospel, because it is an echo thereof, the devout "author lays down the doctrine of truth that runs "through his book, even as it has been the actuating "principle of his life: '*Happy is he whom Truth by "'itself doth teach, not by figures and words that pass "'away, but as it is in itself. Our own opinion and our "'own sense do often deceive us, and they discern but "'little. What availeth it to cavil and dispute much "'about dark and hidden things, for ignorance of which "'we shall not be reproved at the day of judgment? It "'is a great folly to neglect the things that are profitable "'and necessary, and to choose to dwell upon that which "'is curious and hurtful. We have eyes and see not. "'And what have we to do with* genera *and* species? "'*He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh is delivered "'from many an opinion. From one Word are all "'things, and all things utter one Word; and this is "'the Beginning which also speaketh unto us. No man "'without that Word understandeth or judgeth rightly. "'He to whom all things are one, he who reduceth all "'things to one, and seeth all things in one, may enjoy "'a quiet mind, and remain at peace in God. O God, "'who art Truth itself, make me one with Thee in*

"'*everlasting love. It wearieth me often to read and* "'*hear many things: in Thee is all that I would have* "'*and can desire. Let all teachers hold their peace; let* "'*all creatures be silent in Thy light; speak Thou alone* "'*unto me.*' Can you imagine a sublimer passage "coming from a human hand?

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"Was the author opposed to learning? The "many expressions in which he speaks so lightly of "purely human knowledge or scholastic disputations, "would lead one to think that he was inclined to "disparage all such. Nothing was farther from his "intention. His whole life was devoted to the work "of education. He had formed and sent forth, well "equipped, many distinguished pupils and disciples. "He never lost his taste for books. To transcribe "and spread abroad good books both in sacred and "profane learning had been his delight. In one of "his sermons he exclaims, 'Blessed are the hands of "'such transcribers! Which of the writings of our "'ancestors would now be remembered, if there had "'been no pious hand to transcribe them?' But as "*The Imitation* treats of the finite and the temporal in "their relations with the infinite and the eternal, "naturally all things purely human, though not in "themselves insignificant, suffer by comparison. In "this sense does he define his position: '*Learning*, "'*science*—scientia—*is not to be blamed, nor the mere* "'*knowledge of anything whatsoever, for that is good in* "'*itself and ordained of God; but*,' he adds, looking

"at things from his elevated point of view, and in all "truth may he say it, '*a good conscience and a virtuous* "'*life are always to be preferred before it.*' Not the "knowledge he condemns, but the pride, the vanity, "the worldliness that are sometimes found in its train. "'*Because many endeavour rather to get knowledge than* "'*to live well, they are often deceived, and reap either* "'*none or but little fruit.*' In like manner, the author "places true greatness, not in great intellectual attain- "ments, but rather in great love and humility: '*He* "'*is truly great that hath great love. He is truly great* "'*that is little in himself and that maketh no account of* "'*any height of honor.*'

"Here we find ourselves at the second word in "which the philosophy of *The Imitation* is summed "up. It is not only the Light of Truth; it is also the "Life of Grace. This life consists in the practice of "the Christian virtues; the practice of the Christian "virtues leads up to union with Christ; and union "with Christ is consummated in the Holy Eucharist. "Such is the author's philosophy of life, and in its "development does his genius especially glow. He is "mystical, eloquent, sublime. He soars into the highest "regions of truth in which meet both poetry and "philosophy. Following in the footsteps of Christ, "heeding His words, living in intimate union with Him, "loving Him with a love that counts no sacrifice too "great, trampling under foot all things displeasing to "Him, bearing one's burden cheerfully for His sake— "such is the life of the soul as revealed in this won-

"derful book. And the author lays stress on the all-
"important truth that this life should primarily be built
"upon doctrine. Conscience must be instructed and
"trained to form correct decisions: '*My words are*
"'*spirit and life, and not to be weighed by the under-*
"'*standing of man. . . . Write thou My words in thy*
"'*heart, and meditate diligently on them, for in time of*
"'*temptation they will be very needful for thee.*' . . .
"Then Love steps in and fructifies the soul and makes
"it bear good actions, actions acceptable and pleasing
"to God. It is the vital principle energizing the
"world of Grace. And here the author bursts forth
"into a canticle of love that finds in every soul a
"responsive chord: '*Love is a great thing, yea, a great*
"'*and thorough good. . . . Nothing is sweeter than*
"'*Love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing*
"'*wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better*
"'*in heaven and earth; because Love is born of God,*
"'*and can rest but in God above all created things.*'

* * * * * *

"Forthwith, the loving soul is instructed in the
"diverse ways of guarding and preserving grace and
"virtue, of overcoming temptations, of fleeing and
"contemning the world, of trying to be meek and lowly
"and forbearing, and of seeking intimate union with the
"Beloved. The inclinations of nature, the windings
"and subterfuges of passion, the dangers from within
"one's self and the troubles and annoyances that come
"from without, are all treated with a terseness, clear-
"ness, simplicity and unction that are not met with

"outside of the Sacred Scriptures from which they are "reflected. But the devout soul is especially to seek "strength and comfort and consolation in union with "Christ in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. It "contains food for the hungering, healing for the sick; "it is the fountain at which the weary and parched "soul may slake her thirst; it is the fruition of all life, "the goal of all struggle, the crowning of all effort. "Hear how beautifully the pious author expresses the "soul's great need for this saving food: '*Whilst I am* "'*detained in the prison of this body, I acknowledge* "'*myself to stand in need of two things, to wit, food* "'*and light. Unto me, then, thus weak and helpless,* "'*Thou hast given Thy Sacred Body for the nourish-* "'*ment both of my soul and body; and Thy Word Thou* "'*hast set as a light unto my feet. Without these two* "'*I should not be able to live, for the Word of God is* "'*the light of my soul, and Thy Sacrament the bread of* "'*life. . . . Thanks be unto Thee, O Thou Creator and* "'*Redeemer of mankind, who, to manifest Thy love to* "'*the whole world, hast prepared a great supper, wherein* "'*Thou hast set before us to be eaten, not the typical* "'*lamb, but Thy most Sacred Body and Blood, rejoicing* "'*all the faithful with this holy banquet, and replenish-* "'*ing them to the full with the cup of salvation in which* "'*are all the delights of paradise; and the holy angels* "'*do feast with us, but yet with a more happy sweetness.*'

* * * * * *

"How, it may be asked, was the author able to "compass within the covers of this slender volume, so

"much wisdom, such a vast spiritual experience, such "beautiful poetry and profound philosophy? And he "has done all this with a grasp and terseness of ex- "pression to which no translation has ever been able "to do justice. It is because Thomas à Kempis is "more than a pious monk, picking up the experiences "of the Saints and Fathers who preceded him; he is "one of the world-authors; and *The Imitation* is so "clearly stamped with the impress of his genius, that "wherever men can read they recognize it as a book "that comes home to their business and bosoms for all "time. Go where you will, you will perceive its silent "influence working for good, and upon natures that "seem least prepared to be affected by it.

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"Here is the secret of the magic influence wielded "by *The Imitation.* Pick it up when or where we "may, open it at any page we will, we always find "something to suit our frame of mind. The author's "genius has such complete control of the subject, and "handles it with so firm a grasp, that in every sentence "we find condensed the experience of ages. It is "humanity finding in this simple man an adequate "mouthpiece for the utterance of its spiritual wants "and soul-yearnings. And his expression is so full "and adequate because he regarded things in the "white light of God's truth, and saw their nature and "their worth clearly and distinctly, as divested of the "hues and tints flung around them by passion and "illusion."

Such is *The Imitation of Christ*, as portrayed by one who knows and understands it. It will not, then, appear strange that I, poring over the precious book, came to long for some knowledge of its author—to learn what manner of man he was, what life he led, amidst what surroundings and influences, and by what path he reached to such a height of grace and communion with God as to be enabled, in the dark valley of this mortal life, to hold up the beacon, and point out the way to light and rest eternal.

To me it has been a labour of love to pursue this study, to snatch half-hours from the turmoil of a wearisome life to turn over dusty volumes and trace out as best I could his saintly career. I have no doubt others feel with me. We read with avidity the lives of great men and heroes—kings, statesmen, conquerors and valiant soldiers, saints and martyrs, historians, poets, composers, philosophers, and inventors, apostles of science and art devoted to serve and benefit mankind. Shall we not equally pine to know something, beyond the meagre sketches within easy reach, of the saintly Thomas à Kempis, the lowly monk of Mount St. Agnes, the great master of the Spiritual life, the matchless explorer in the mystic arcana of that knowledge which of all knowledge concerns us most deeply for this world and for the eternity to which we are drifting fast? Every one who knows *The Imitation of Christ* loves it; most people keep it by them, and commit to memory its beautiful maxims. It has been translated into some fifty languages, has passed through

over six thousand editions,* and has enjoyed a wider circulation than any book extant, the Bible alone excepted. For all that, few know much of its history, of the story of its birth, the circumstances under which it was written, the sources from which it is mainly derived. Still fewer have learned the baseless doubts and strange contentions which have been raised and circulated about its authorship, or the halo of interest in which it is enveloped. For these reasons, I venture to hope that some of the many who read and love the precious book may take an interest in a brief account of my researches, put in homely fashion and easily accessible to all.

* See Thomas à Kempis and the Imitation of Christ, by Edmund Waterton, p. 22. Suttaby & Co., London: 1883.

PART II.

LET us look back into the years preceding the fifteenth century. Strange and troubled were those times, and fraught with scandal and confusion. Human ambition and the curses of wealth and worldliness had eaten their way, so far as God permitted, into the very fold of Christ. Prosperity had done its worst. What persecution had failed to do, luxury bade fair to accomplish. To a considerable extent the morals of the people, and even of the clergy, from the highest to the lowest, were deeply corrupted, and the Church appeared in urgent danger. The Council of Lyons, summoned by Pope Gregory X., A.D. 1274, succeeded in adjusting for the time the schism of the Greeks, and peace reigned until the death of Michael Palæologus, Emperor of Constantinople. Then the heresy broke forth again, and has never since been extinguished.

Amidst the confusion and disorder thus inaugurated, a still more scandalous schism rose up to harass and lay waste the Church of God—the Papal schism, the great schism of the West. An internal convulsion now

shook the House of God. Rival Popes struggled for the Chair of Peter, Christendom was bewildered, nations doubted whom they should obey, and the unity of faith seemed in peril. Never since the days of Julian the Apostate uprose a crisis so terrible or so dangerous. Still, above all came the promise of God, that He would be with His Church all days, even to the consummation of the world. Hence neither persecution, heresy, nor laxity ever shook the Faith, because, as St. Bernard tells us, "The generation of "Christians can never come to an end; neither can "faith perish from the earth, nor charity from within "the Church."

Just about this time a great religious movement commenced in Northern Germany and the adjacent Low Countries. Holy men, gifted mystics, of earnest faith and saintly lives, began to teach, and so impressively to inculcate their doctrines, that the people, hitherto steeped in worldliness and neglectful of all religious obligations, turned an attentive ear and returned in vast crowds to their spiritual allegiance. Pre-eminent amongst these great leaders, I may point out John Tauler, of Strasburg, Suso, Ruysbroeck,* and Henry de Kalcar.

The mention of the last name leads us directly to his illustrious convert, a most remarkable man, the model of a true reformer, some account of whose career and work must necessarily preface our study

* See references to the works of Tauler, Suso, and Ruysbroeck in Bibliography following preface.

of à Kempis. This was Gerard Groot, often surnamed The Great. The fullest account we have of his life is from the pen of Thomas à Kempis.* From this memoir, from his *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, and from John Busch's *Chronicle of Windesheim*,† I shall now extract an outline.

The venerable Gerard Groot, surnamed The Great, was born in Deventer, in Holland, about the year of our Lord 1340. His parents were people of wealth and good position, much honoured and distinguished in their country, and they watched with tender solicitude over the education of their son. While still a youth, but fifteen years old, Gerard was sent for the completion of his education to the schools of Paris. Whilst there, if he surpassed his comrades in luxury and extravagance, he steadily kept in view the motive which led him thither—namely, to make rapid progress in his studies. As yet the glory of God was not the main object of his thoughts. He pursued the shadow of a great name, and sought to gain renown amongst men. Very early, while but in his eighteenth year, after the ordinary course of study, genius helping the aspirations of his ambition, Gerard took his degree

* Life of Gerard Groot, Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

† In a single volume, dated Antwerp, 1621, and edited by H. Rosweyd, S.J., we find the Chronicle of Windesheim, by John Busch; the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, by Thomas à Kempis; and the Vindiciae Kempenses, by H. Rosweyd, S.J.; the latter is followed by an Appendix. All these publications, except the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, which was printed by Verduss, of Antwerp, are from the celebrated house of Peter and John Beller.

of Master. Raised to this position, and combining brilliant intellectual powers with a taste for the pomps and vanities of the world, rich benefices were heaped upon him, amongst others a Canonry at Aix-la-Chapelle, another at Utrecht.

Behold him now fairly set forth on the broad path of life, his heart as yet untouched by Heaven's voice. But a great and merciful change awaited this gifted man—the call to an exalted sanctity and heavenly mission. This unforeseen and unexpected change was revealed beforehand to a holy Solitary in the city of Cologne, and was foretold by him.

One day when Gerard was at Cologne, yielding himself unrestrainedly to worldly enjoyment, this Solitary, indicating him by name and description, predicted that his conversion was at hand, and that it would bring great blessings to many. A friend, aware of this prophecy, sought out Gerard and said to him: "What dost thou here? Why dost thou engross "thyself with vanities and follies? Thou art destined "to become a new man." Gerard received these words as a pleasant joke, and at the moment paid them no attention.

At that time there lived, near Arnheim, in Gelderland, a holy monk, Prior of the Order of Carthusians at the Convent of Monichuisen. This was Henry de Kalcar, a learned and pious man, who had known Gerard intimately in the world. This saintly recluse, who burned with the fire of charity, and was ani-

mated by zeal for the saving of souls, set himself to discover how he might see Gerard Groot and speak with him on the subject of his eternal salvation. "Should such a man," thought he, "be left to "perish in the world's vortex? Is there no means "of rescuing him, by God's help, from the chains of "Satan, and of inducing him to enter the body of the "Elect?"

In those days, alas! the world seemed entirely under the dominion of the evil spirit. Hardly any lived as became Christians, and few of the clergy, by speech or example, preached the Word of Life. Withal, amongst the Carthusians the light of Heaven was preserved in their seclusion; and their pious customs, so austere and unbearable in the eyes of the sensual and worldly, were all the more precious in the sight of God, and beloved and sought after by holy souls.

Meanwhile de Kalcar had occasion to go to Utrecht on special business, and, having learned that Gerard Groot was there, he contrived to accomplish the task he had so much at heart. The problem was how to dispose the nets of his discourse so as to capture this great prize and rescue him from the waves of perdition. He arranged his exhortation with consummate judgment. He commenced the attack from the vantage-ground of intimate friendship, accosting Gerard as an old fellow-student, and as his genial host. He discoursed learnedly, as with one learned like himself, upon the sovereign good; held up to him on the one hand the eternal reward, and on the other the

terrors of judgment. With solemn and grave truths he mingled consoling thoughts. He put forth the praises of religion, the condemnation of worldliness, and the instability of human things. "Death hangs "over us," said he, "but the day and hour we know "not; and oh! how infinite the reward promised to "the faithful disciples of Jesus Christ!" These pious conferences, often repeated, were blessed with abundant grace. The heart of Gerard softened, the learned Master submitted to be led. He gave himself up to the Truth, yielding to the power of reason and divine grace. God's promises enticed him; the examples of the saints encouraged and confirmed his resolutions; and, in fine, he determined to change his life, and to renounce the world and all its pomps.

When the good Prior realized Gerard's holy dispositions, he was overwhelmed with joy. He felt that the Word of God, like seed cast on fertile ground, was well sown, and that the mighty prize so earnestly sought for was now secured, and rescued from the stormy deep. Yes, God alone, by His infinite power, bestowed on His chosen one, Gerard Groot, the blessings of His mercy, and changed him from a lion into a lamb—that God who predestined him before time began to be united with Himself, and ordained that in the lapse of ages he should preach His Word to countless cities and people, and thereby bring honour and glory to His Holy Name.

Gerard's fervent resolutions were soon put into execution. Free in will and trusting in God, he re-

nounced all his Church benefices, stripped off the garments befitting his former position, and clothed himself with the simplicity of a humble ecclesiastic who chose the contempt of the world rather than its glories and riches. Many were astounded at the change, and it became a topic of general discussion. "What is the "man about? What has happened to him?" inquired many; while others said, "Is it that his great learning "has upset his mind?"

Meantime Gerard, not troubling himself about such remarks, or the ridicule of the world, turned all his thoughts to God, consecrating to Him every sentiment of his heart. "*I have chosen*," said he, "*to be an abject "in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the "tabernacles of sinners.*" * Thus from being rich he became poor, from being proud he became humble. His fastidiousness was changed to mortification, his levity to constancy, his worldliness to the highest spirituality, and his search for knowledge to simplicity and devotion.

As yet there was reason to fear lest the germ of salvation, deposited in the heart of Gerard, might prove like the seed that fell upon the road and was trodden down by those passing by, or like that which was carried away by the birds of the air.† It was to be apprehended that the plant, young and fragile, bent down by the gusts of vanity, might be laid prostrate on the ground before it gained strength to tower to heaven.

* Psalm lxxxiii. 11. † Matt. chap. xiii., paraphrase.

Therefore the humble Master wished to bury himself for a time in retreat, prudently seeking to avoid the sight of men and the conversation of worldlings. He wished to liberate his soul from all things of this world, in order that with perfect freedom he might yield himself up to God. He felt it necessary that he should learn, by his own experience, that which he was about to teach to others; that, having tasted the delights of heaven, he might be more patient of adversity and less timid against the temptations of the devil.

Accordingly, he left his native city, departed from his father's house, and went forth to seek at Monichuisen the Carthusian Brothers whom he loved in our Lord Jesus Christ. They received him with the utmost respect and gave him a cell, entertaining him as a guest worthy of every possible consideration and affection. Gerard, entering his cell, full of joy and ardour, exclaimed, like St. Peter, in the fulness of his soul, "*Lord, it is good for us to be here.*"* There, in solitude, he recalled to order his senses lately given up to worldliness, wiped off the blight of his former irregularities, and restored in all its clearness the mirror of the interior life. There, by fasting and watching, he broke down rebellious passions; there, by tears and prayers, he repelled the various temptations of the devil, exclaiming with holy King David, "*Lo, I have gone far off flying away; and "I abode in the wilderness. I waited for him that*

* Matt. xvii. 4.

"*hath saved me from pusillanimity of spirit, and a "storm.*" *

Behold now the new soldier of Christ courageously encamped in the Convent of the Carthusians. The monotony of the cell cannot subdue his soul, the fatigue of labour cannot weary his body. A faithful inmate of the Cloister, he keeps watch over his heart and tongue. Henceforth the spiritual warfare is to be waged, a warfare against flesh and blood; and in order the sooner to effect the complete overthrow of the devil—the Prince of Darkness and ruler of the world—he in solitude directs his weapons against himself. He crucifies his flesh, with its vices and concupiscences, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Notwithstanding his delicate frame, he imposes upon himself frequent fasts, he abstains from meat in conformity with the custom of the Carthusian order, and denies himself a thousand lawful gratifications. He prolongs his vigils far into the night; he kneels and prays, and, filled with the spirit of fervour, compels his body to be subject to his soul. The devout Master daily made rapid progress in virtue, and the world became more and more contemptible in his eyes as he tasted the sweetness of the love of God.

At last the time for reaping the harvest arrived, and, by the interposition of Providence, wise men, and especially the Carthusian brethren, were unanimously of opinion that this burning lamp should be so placed as to shed its light on those who needed it most. All

* Psalm liv. 8, 9.

were convinced that the eloquence of his preaching, combined with the example of his holy life, would reach the hearts of sinners. On his part Gerard burned with anxiety to do good to others, to make them sharers in his own happiness, following Christ our Saviour, "*Who will have all men to be saved, "and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*"* Accordingly, he was ordained Deacon at Utrecht, his humility preventing his receiving the order of priesthood. Having devoted three years to study and prayer, at last, furnished with all the spiritual arms, and committing to his wonderful memory the Holy Scripture, and the writings of the Fathers, amongst whom his favourites were St. Augustine and St. Bernard,† this herald of the Faith ardently preaches in towns and cities, and proclaims the gospel in presence of the clergy and laity.

Men and women, old and young, the learned and unlearned, flock to hear him. Once he put the trumpet of the gospel to his lips, all the truths necessary to salvation strike upon the ears of his hearers. Nothing is forgotten. He declares boldly the divine will with respect to each, according to age, sex, state, and condition. Throughout the diocese he preached the holy Word of God, not for gain but for His love—in Utrecht, Zwolle, Kampen, Amersford, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Gouda, Leyden, Zutphen, and

* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

† See Busch's account of his death, Chronicle of Windesheim, book i. chap. v.

elsewhere. His hearers feel their hearts penetrated, and fancy themselves already before the judgment-seat. At once they change their lives, and, abandoning the career of sin, "*bring forth fruits worthy of "penance.*"* All give themselves to prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, to appease the anger of the Creator and to invoke His mercy. Numbers having heard the great preacher come with contrite hearts to submit to his direction. Many renounce the vanities of the world and its pleasures, and form themselves into congregations devoted to the service of God.

But every rose has its thorn, every glory its drawback. The virtue of the good exposes them to the jealousy of the wicked, and accordingly Gerard experienced frequent opposition from corrupt and worldly men. They secretly slandered the man of God, and endeavoured to excite revolt against him. They could not pardon the vehemence with which he upbraided them for their vices and denounced their iniquities.

Sad to relate, many of the clergy and monks, leading lives unworthy of their high calling, rebelled against the teaching of this great man, and against his zeal in rebuking those who transgressed God's law. They sought to blacken his character and shake his courage. He himself speaks of them in these words: "I am surrounded by men who do not cease to cry "out against me; their wrath bursts forth, but no one "dares to show himself." His love for Jesus Christ

* Matt. iii. 8; Luke iii. 8.

and his zeal for souls prevented him from being disconcerted or exasperated by the attacks of his slanderers. His work was founded on a rock. Careless of earthly glory he feared not to suffer for Christ, and was prepared to sacrifice himself for the truth.

We shall not tarry over the history of his extraordinary missionary labours and successes, nor of the trials and persecutions he patiently endured. We shall pass on to the grandest incident of his holy life.

The clergy of several churches were opposed to Gerard, and, instigated by jealousy, resolved to arrest his career, and for this end surreptitiously procured his suspension from public preaching. Most humbly he submitted to their wrath, and, fearing above all things to excite ill-feeling between the people and the priests, he said to the crowd who were indignant at his suspension, "They are our superiors, we will obey "their commands; it is our duty to do so, and be-"coming. God forbid that we should seek to injure "any man or cause a scandal. The Lord knows His "own; He has chosen them from the beginning, and "can, without the aid of our ministry, call them to "Himself by His grace, in His own time."

Gerard ceased to preach. Great a man as the holy missioner was, what act of his life equals this grand obedience?—What a contrast to his contemporary, the ill-fated John Wyclif, and even still more to later so-called reformers, whose lives belied their words and evidenced at once the defiance of lawful authority and the subjection to their own evil inclinations. Gerard

had read, in its true spirit, the New Testament of Jesus Christ, and loved God and His Church rather than himself or his passions.

Out of evil good will often come. Debarred from preaching in public, Gerard occupied himself in consoling and exhorting communities and individuals, and devoted special care to superintending the work of scholars engaged in transcribing the Holy Scriptures and books of theology and piety—an employment of great importance and emolument in those days, before the invention of the art of printing. Being settled once more in his native city of Deventer, he drew around him a number of exemplary men, both of the priesthood and laity, many of whom had been converted by his eloquent preaching. Living together in a species of community they were soon joined by others, of various rank and education—persons of ample means, scholars, copyists, and even artisans of skill in different handicrafts—all willingly renouncing the world and its attractions to embrace a life of mortification and sanctity. In order that holy women, aspiring to perfection, might not be excluded from participation in the good work, Gerard founded a convent adjoining his own house, where those who entered followed a similar life and carried out various industries suited to their sex and capabilities.

It would appear that Florentius Radewyn, the illustrious and beloved disciple of Gerard Groot, whose career we shall later sketch, took a very active part in the formation of this community, and was en-

trusted from the beginning with its care and organization. In fact, Busch tells us that it was Florentius who proposed to Gerard the idea of forming into a community the clerics and aspirants by whom they were surrounded.* Groot was at first averse to the project, fearing the opposition of the mendicant orders, an apprehension by no means unfounded,† but he finally yielded to the solicitations of his disciple.

Under the direction of these two holy men, Gerard and Florentius, was thus originated the society subsequently known as "The Congregation of Common Life," and at that time called "The Modern Devotion."‡ The leading idea which bound together these earnest seekers for holiness was an endeavour to return to the Christian life of the Apostolic Age. All lived in community, in poverty, chastity, and perfect obedience to their superiors; all worked for the common good, and contributed their earnings to the general fund, spending any vacant time in prayer, pious reading, works of charity, and almsgiving. *"And the multitude of believers "had but one heart and one soul. For neither was there*

* Chronicle of Windesheim, p. 6. See also The Lives of the Disciples of Florentius, by Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, p. 10.

‡ This title of "The Modern Devotion" led to its members being familiarly addressed as "devoti." I allude to this point now, as the frequent occurrence of the word in the Imitation of Christ, and in the other works of Thomas à Kempis, has a special significance, being one out of very many internal evidences which identify Thomas as the author of the great book. The meaning of the word "devotus," thus used, is by no means conveyed by the ordinary translation, "devout."

*"any one needy among them, for as many as were owners "of lands or houses sold them, and brought the price of "the things they had sold, and laid it down before the "feet of the apostles."**

This "Congregation of Common Life" grew apace and flourished, but still one important detail remained to be accomplished. Gerard knew that to make the institution a lasting success it would be necessary to place it under some definite spiritual guidance, and on that choice he was still undecided.

About this time, inspired by God, he conceived the project of visiting the celebrated John Ruysbroeck, Superior of a convent of Augustinian Canons Regular, at Groenendaal, in Brabant, and of taking counsel with that holy mystic. He set forth upon his journey, accompanied by a saintly priest, John Cele, Rector of the School at Zwolle, and a pious layman named Gerard, who acted as their guide and companion.

After a long and arduous journey they finally reached Groenendaal, not far from Brussels. There they saw no fine houses or imposing buildings, but found all the evidences of poverty and simplicity. Those who dwelt therein walked in the footsteps of the Celestial King, the humble Son of the Virgin Mary. Entering the monastery they met upon its threshold the holy Father—the devout Prior whom they had come to visit. He was a venerable old man, kind, gentle, and polished in manners. He welcomed the new-comers, and, as if inspired, immediately recog-

* Acts iv. 32, 34, 35.

nized Gerard Groot and addressed him by name. Greeting his visitors he led them into the cloister, and received them with all the graces of hospitality. Here Gerard remained some time, devoted to holy conferences, pouring forth to Ruysbroeck his thoughts and difficulties, and, struck with admiration for all he saw in this edifying convent of Augustinian Canons Regular, formed the resolution to place his new community under the spiritual guidance of that Order. Returning once more to Deventer he again resumed his labours, in the intervals of which he matured his plans concerning the "Congregation of Common Life." Many difficulties had to be overcome, many details to be arranged and perfected, amidst all of which his disciple, Florentius Radewyn, was the ever-faithful helpmate and confidant.

As time went by and these enterprises prospered, a reaction commenced in favour of Gerard Groot. The injustice of his suspension from the right to preach became too glaring, and efforts were made to regain for him his privileges. A powerful remonstrance against the evils and injuries he had so patiently endured was addressed by an unknown friend to Florentius Wevelichoven, Bishop of Utrecht—an inquiry was demanded, and even the holy Master himself thought it right to put forth a protestation, defying his enemies to show that he had ever taught or preached one word of heresy. Furthermore, William of Salvarvilla, Archdeacon of Brabant, addressed an urgent appeal to Pope Urban VI. in favour of Groot. The common impres-

sion is that the suspension remained in force, but I am not at all satisfied that such was the case. I think it only right to observe that although we have no express statement in Thomas' writings relative to its withdrawal, there is strong reason to infer that it either had been removed, or dated only a few months before Gerard's death. This seems evident from the following words, to which I would draw attention here. In Thomas' *Life of Gerard,* chap. ix. 1, we read: "He was "silent *for a time* (ad tempus), and meanwhile gave "himself up to private exhortations," etc. Far more explicit, however, are the statements contained in the first chapter of the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes,* in which, beyond denial, we find evidence of Gerard preaching in public, and, as à Kempis adds in the last sentence, this took place in the year in which Gerard died.

Bitter censure has naturally been launched against this suspension and its assumed continuance, but, in justice to the memory of Wevelichoven, Bishop of Utrecht, who proved himself a sincere friend to the Congregation of Common Life established by Gerard, and who won the warm commendations of Thomas à Kempis,* and of Busch,† I think it only right to put forward the facts stated above.

Howsoever all this may have been, certain it is that God had great designs for Gerard, and gave to his servant inestimable grace, which was not bestowed

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, pp. 146, 156.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, p. 164.

in vain. "*For by the fruit the tree is known.*" * Animated and sustained by the Spirit of God, he applied himself with ever-increasing zeal to works of mercy, assisting his neighbour in all compassion, giving to afflicted souls, like a charitable physician, the relief of divine consolation, awakening those steeped in the lethargy of sin to a better life, calling back the relapsing sinner by repeated exhortations, and restoring him by tears and prayers to his long-lost state of grace. Participating largely in the mercies of the Lord, and sharing them abundantly with others, he could justly say with the Psalmist, "*But I, as a fruitful olive tree in* "*the house of God, have hoped in the mercy of God for* "*ever, yea for ever and ever.*" † Behold in him the true Israelite, the defender and zealous preacher of divine truth; a man who, wholly absorbed in the divine love, never neglected his fellow-creature, but, keeping his soul raised towards heaven, failed not to provide for the wants of others; a man, in fine, who, not satisfied with working out his own salvation, evermore spent himself in striving to do good to others, and to lead them on the way of perfection. Thus, although his life was brief and he never bore the burden of old age, he in a short time reaped great fruits, and left behind him the nucleus of the Congregation which he founded—peopled by saintly men and women, to many of whom he had been the first to communicate the light of grace and the zealous charity with which his soul was inflamed.

* Matt. xii. 33. † Psalm li. 10.

Meanwhile, God had ordained that the holy Master should not see the fulfilment of his heart's desires, but that he should be called to his eternal reward in the very fulness of his work. In those days the plague raged in Holland, and Gerard was stricken down, catching the dread infection from a friend whom he attended in that terrible illness. Feeling that his end was drawing nigh, the faithful servant accepted without a murmur the final summons, fortified his soul by receiving the holy viaticum, and, like a dutiful child, cheerfully accepted the pangs of death, hoping by his humble resignation to appease the wrath of the Eternal Judge. Filled with sentiments of faith and contrition, he committed himself unreservedly to the Divine Will, and, calling together the brethren, briefly addressed them :—"*Behold,*" said he, "*the hour of my death is at hand. God calls me to Himself. Augustine and Bernard invite me to join the happy company of the blessed.** *The time allotted to me here below is well-nigh ended, and in common with all mortals I must pay the debt of nature. May God grant me a safe passage from this world to eternity, and may my soul be united to the Lord who created it. To the earth I bequeath this poor frail body; it is but fitting that dust should return to dust. May the Saviour for whose love I have laboured and preached deign to grant me eternal repose.*"

His disciples, who were one and all overwhelmed with grief, exclaimed in tears, "*Alas! alas! what*

* The feasts of these great saints were just at hand.

"shall we do? Who will henceforth guide us? You "are our father and protector. It was you who first "drew us to the service of God. Already our enemies "rejoice openly, and ere long we shall be exposed to their "worst efforts. If during your lifetime they reviled "and persecuted us, how will it be when you are "gone? Intercede for us, we beseech you, and obtain "help for the children you leave orphans. By your "counsels we have amended our lives, obtain for us the "grace of perseverance."

The tender, compassionate Master, moved by his children's grief, addressed to them words of consolation and encouragement. *"Dear children,"* he said, *"place "all your confidence in God; give no heed to the vain "clamour of men. Be firm in your good resolutions. "The Lord will be with you in this place. No man has "power to destroy a work which the Almighty has "approved. I trust shortly to be united with Him in "heaven, and from thence I shall cast down some holy "blossoms, which, ripening in your souls, will bear "fruit in the days to come. I commend you all to "God and to His saints. My well-beloved disciple, "the Reverend Florentius, will henceforth be your "father and guide. The Holy Spirit dwells within "him; therefore follow his counsels with docility. "There is no man whom I hold in higher veneration "and esteem. In him I place implicit confidence. I "exhort you, my dear children, to love and honour him "as a father."* *

* Life of Gerard Groot, chap. xvi., Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

Questioned as to his wishes concerning the spiritual guidance of the new Congregation, he strongly advised that it should be placed under the care of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. To the last, in touching words, he consoled and exhorted his sorrowing disciples, until his strength failed, and he had entered the valley of the shadow of death. Finally, on the evening of the 20th of August, 1384, the feast of his beloved St. Bernard, Gerard Groot, then aged forty-four years, yielded up to God his pure, devoted soul.

Thus lived and died this gifted man, most justly called Gerard the Great, the apostle of his country, saintly, devoted, and learned, humble, and meekly obedient to all lawful authority—the true reformer, the model for all missionaries, the architect of one of the grandest schemes ever devised for calling back erring man to the fold of Christ.

The brief outline which I have endeavoured to sketch of his career, in obedience to the necessities of this essay, may perhaps induce others to turn to the sources from which I have drawn it, namely, Busch's *Chronicle of Windesheim*, and Gerard's life, as portrayed by Thomas à Kempis, both in his histories of the Brethren of the Congregation of Common Life, and in his *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*. Those who do so will begin to wonder how earnest and learned men, like Bonet-Maury and Kettlewell,* can

* Gérard de Groote, un précurseur de la Réforme. G. Bonet-Maury, pp. 87–89. Paris: Sandos et Fischbacker, 1878. Also

find a resemblance between Gerard of Deventer and the unfortunate John Wyclif.

Three years ago the fifth centenary of Wyclif's death evoked an outburst of enthusiasm amongst his admirers. It seems strange that the memory of Gerard Groot lay forgotten in his fifth centenary, for he too died in the same year. Place the two histories side by side, study the men, their work, and the influences they generated, and it will not be difficult to decide which was the man of God, the real Apostle, and the true Reformer.*

Florentius Radewyn, to whom Gerard Groot entrusted the care of his disciples and the completion of the enterprise he had begun, needs now a brief memoir at our hands. We shall draw our information concerning him from the same historians who enabled us to sketch the life of Gerard. Of Florentius it may be truly said, as of his master, that he realized the words which our Divine Lord addressed to His disciples when He bade them follow Him in the lowly path which leads to the eternal kingdom. "*Take up My yoke upon "you, and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble "of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls.*"†

About the year of our Lord 1350, Florentius Radewyn was born at Leyderdam, a town situated not

Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common life, Rev. S. Kettlewell, vol. i. p. 150.

* See The Truth about John Wyclif, by the Rev. J. Stevenson, S.J. Burns and Oates. London: 1885.

† Matt. xi. 29.

far from Utrecht, and on the borders of Holland. His father was a man of high reputation and independent means, and sent his son, while quite a youth, to Prague, the seat of a far-famed university. Gifted with rare intelligence, Florentius made rapid progress, and soon became distinguished in every branch of science. Having completed his studies, and taken his degree as Master, he returned to his native city, and quickly became immensely popular, his gracious manners and gay disposition rendering him a favourite amongst his youthful companions. Pure of heart and irreproachable in his life, he entered the Church, and became a canon of St. Peter's at Utrecht. Ere long, however, God mercifully withdrew him from the temptations to which he was exposed, and, inspiring him with an ardent longing for holiness, led him to enter the ways of perfection.

The venerable Gerard Groot preached constantly in the Church of Our Blessed Lady at Deventer, and Florentius often went to hear him. The inspired words of the great apostle sank deeply into his heart; a burning desire to renounce the world and devote himself entirely to God took possession of his mind. From a Master of Science he became a follower of Christ, saying with the Psalmist, "*O how great is the "multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast "hidden for them that fear Thee!*" *

"*My sheep hear My voice; and I know them, and "they follow Me.*" †

* Psalm xxx. 20.

† John x. 27.

Florentius sought and obtained an interview with Gerard, confided to him the noble aspirations which filled his soul, and implored him to guide his footsteps. A holy friendship thus arose between these saintly men; they conversed together of God and His service, and, animated by an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, united their efforts to further the work of regeneration. Florentius, deeply imbued with the true apostolic spirit, laboured unceasingly with Gerard to reclaim those who had fallen into error, and strenuously exhorted all to lead pure and holy lives. The vigour and unction of his discourses attracted towards him a multitude of young persons of both sexes, who longed to aim at perfection.

Thus, as we have already seen, with the consent of Gerard, and under the direction of Florentius, was formed the Society known as the Congregation of Common Life. Florentius unceasingly exhorted each and all to make progress in virtue, to pray often, to devote themselves at suitable times to manual labour, to read the Holy Scriptures and pious works, and to meditate on subjects calculated to excite contrition, in order by these means to acquire greater fervour of devotion and horror of vice, so that there might no longer be found cowardly hearts allowing themselves to be led away by the seductions of the devil.

The good work which he thus accomplished soon earned for him much hatred and obloquy, but to all the insults and outrages of his enemies he offered only an unconquerable patience. To suffer for and with the

Divine Lord was deemed by him an inestimable privilege, for he knew well what the Holy Scriptures teach: "*Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you, and when "they shall separate you, and shall reproach you, and cast "out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.*" *

Groot, seeing the great sanctity of his disciple, resolved that he should be raised to the dignity of the priesthood. Florentius deemed himself unworthy of so great an honour, and urged that this heavy responsibility should not be imposed upon him; but, overcome by the authority of Gerard, and the importunities of his companions, he finally yielded from obedience. Promoted to Holy Orders, he never evinced the least sign of pride or satisfaction, but became all the more humble in his acts and manners in proportion as he was exalted by the sacrament. It was in speaking of him that Gerard bore this remarkable testimony: "*I was instrumental in getting only "one priest ordained, and I think indeed that he was "truly worthy, but I shall take good care in future not "to venture on a similar step too rashly, for I see very "few who are suited for this ministry.*" †

Florentius had been Canon of St. Peter's at Utrecht. After a time he resigned this prebend to become a simple curate at Deventer, in order that he might be near to Gerard, in whose work he was enlisted, and by whose teaching and example he desired to profit.

* Luke vi. 22.

† Life of Florentius, Thomas à Kempis, chap. x.

As his sanctity as well as his austerities caused him to be held in great veneration, and as he dreaded above all things to be honoured by men, he avoided as much as possible appearing in public, and used to remain at home with his companions in religion, knowing that this reserve would benefit his own soul and give to others an example of steadfastness. Of so little account did he esteem the honours constantly paid him when abroad, that he often passed unnoticed those who saluted him, and lived in profound indifference as to what others said or thought. When he went to the church, it was his custom to pray all the way thither. Knowing that it is not the outward garb that constitutes the true priest, he paid no attention to his dress, except to banish from it whatever approached to display.

Numbers of the clergy came to visit him, likewise foreigners of every rank, monks, and learned men. He was obliged to set aside his own private business and to sacrifice his inclinations in order to devote himself to the care of his neighbours. Sometimes his ante-room was crowded by so many persons who were desirous of speaking with him, either to consult him or to confide the secrets of their conscience, that with difficulty he could make his way through the crowd or find leisure to recite his office. Yet he never sent any one away unsatisfied ; on the contrary, he either despatched the visitor's business at once, or else gave him an opportunity of returning at a more suitable time.

Florentius was the tenderest of fathers towards the

poor, the gentlest of consolers to the afflicted, and the most compassionate of visitors to those laid low by illness. Often he ordered the viands from his table to be carried to the sick and poor, and when dainties were sent to him out of charity, by an impulse of still greater charity he shared them with the needy. He kept a list of poor people in whose welfare he was interested, and their care was entrusted to one or more of his associates, who were commissioned to provide for their necessities.

At that time there were in the city of Deventer worthy men who, under Florentius' direction, led truly Christian lives. There were also pious ladies, devoted to works of mercy, who frequented the House of God and respected His ministers. These good people, at the request of Florentius, gave large donations to assist the clergy whose lives were devoted to the service of God and of His poor. The humble priest had such a reputation for charity, and was so universally beloved, that he had only to speak in behalf of a poor person in order to obtain forthwith the object of his request.

Little children, and young people conspicuous by their purity and innocence, were to him objects of special tenderness; he gave them pious exhortations, teaching them to love Jesus and Mary, and impressed on them most eloquently how jealously they should preserve their innocence in order that they might become on earth like unto the angels of God, and render themselves worthy to sing in heaven the

Canticle of the Virgins. He felt no repugnance towards lepers or those disfigured by bodily ailments; on the contrary, he studied to evince a special interest in such sufferers. Whatever was revolting in man's exterior never influenced him unfavourably. He saw in each and every one the image of God, and was ever mindful of the tie of nature which binds all humanity together.

The noble example afforded by this saintly and zealous man rendered the community of which he was Superior a veritable school of virtue. There both young and old, priests and laymen, strove earnestly to attain that humility and purity of heart to which alone is granted the beatific vision. The spirit of fervour which had characterized the Primitive Church shone forth once more amongst these true followers of Christ, who willingly renounced the ambitions and comforts of life to seek rest and happiness in the service of God; to realize in true earnest the words of the Gospel: "*He "that followeth Me walketh not in darkness.*" *

It is impossible just now to follow in detail the career of Florentius Radewyn. We shall see a little more of it later when tracing the life of Thomas à Kempis. I must not, however, omit a brief sketch of the crowning work of his life—the foundation of the Monastery of Windesheim. This is indispensable for the completion of my design.

It will be remembered that Gerard Groot, when on his death-bed, exhorted his disciples to put their trust in God, to persevere in their good work, to submit

* John viii. 12.

themselves entirely to the guidance of Florentius, and to place the newly-formed congregation under the spiritual guidance of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine. Busch gives a full account of Gerard's dying advice, including the advice to build a monastery, and the reasons which led him to select the Canons Regular as spiritual directors, in preference to the Carthusians or Cistercians.*

For some time this project was in contemplation—preliminary steps were taken, various localities visited and inspected; but it was not until the year of our Lord 1386, two years after the death of Gerard, that a commencement was actually made. Meantime the approval of Florentius Wevelichoven, Bishop of Utrecht, had been sought and gained. The spot ultimately chosen was a fertile tract, hitherto uncultivated, situated some twenty miles north of Deventer, and about four miles to the south-east of Zwolle. This valuable estate was the property of Berthold ten Have, a rich youth of Zwolle, converted by Gerard Groot, who generously offered it as a site for the new institution. To supplement his munificence, Henry Wilsen, of Kampen, and his brother James, men of wealth and position, added a large endowment.†

In 1386, under the direction of Florentius Radewyn, a chosen band of six intrepid holy men set forth from Deventer to take possession, to commence the clearing of the woods, and the building of the new monastery,

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book i. chap. v.

† Ibid., chap. vi.

which was destined ere long to work such marvels in the vineyard of Christ, and to extend so salutary an influence over Holland, Belgium, and Germany. The locality, called Windesem * (now Windesheim), was held in great reverence, and believed to have been sanctified by the visits of angels.

The six pioneers selected to carry out this great project were—Henry Clingibile, of Huxaria; Werner Keynkamp, of Lochem; Henry Wilsen, of Kampen; John à Kempis; Henry Wilde, of 'S Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-duc); and Berthold ten Have, of Zwolle. Clingibile, who was a priest, was the first Rector; and Wilsen, a man of noted prudence and well versed in temporal matters, was appointed Procurator. Assisted by some of the Brothers, and by many zealous volunteers, and aided by the liberal donations of the faithful, the work was commenced and rapidly perfected, all being carried out under the direction and sanction of Florentius Radewyn.†

As soon as the monastery and church were sufficiently advanced for habitation and use, the six holy men who had inaugurated the work were sent to the Monastery of Canons Regular at Eymsteyn, near Dordrecht (Dort), there to learn in detail and perfection all the rules, customs, and practices of the chosen order. Eymsteyn was a branch house of Groenendaal,

* Busch, according to the fashion of his time, suggests for the Etymology of the name *Vinea Dei Sempiterni;* that is, the Vineyard of the Eternal God.—Chronicle of Windesheim, book i. chap. viii.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, book i. chaps. vii., viii.

where Groot had visited and conferred with Ruysbroeck. Its prior was Brother Simon, the nephew of John van Schoonhoven, who was a disciple of Ruysbroeck and sub-prior of Groenendaal. As soon as the brothers were fully instructed they returned to Windesheim, where they were formally inducted into possession and professed.* The new monastery once inhabited, Werner Keynkamp was elected prior, and Henry Wilde sub-prior. Shortly afterwards Florentius Radewyn sent to Windesheim two devoted clerics, John Vos van Huesden and Henry Balveren, who in due course were received and professed. Of these new members the former was a man of extraordinary sanctity and ability, and upon Werner Keynkamp resigning the office of prior in 1391, he was elected as his successor.† Presently fresh donations poured in abundantly, and the work prospered spiritually and temporally.

From this time forth the grand design of Gerard Groot may be said to have been accomplished. Windesheim had fairly set forth upon its magnificent career, and commenced to spread around its beneficial influence. Fascinating though the task would be, the needful brevity of this sketch obliges me to omit the history of the rapid and stupendous growth of the new monastery, likewise all details of the sanctity and devotedness of its inhabitants, the speed with which it absorbed, as the Mother house, all the Augustinian

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book i. chaps. xi., xiii., xiv.

† Ibid., chaps. xvii., xviii.

monasteries of the adjacent countries, until it numbered as its affiliated children between seventy and eighty religious houses of men and women. Any one who desires to study the subject will find ample details in Busch's *Chronicle of Windesheim*, book i., from chapter xii. to xlvii.

I shall only touch upon one feature of this glorious institution—namely, the character of the teaching of its spiritual school. I deplore my incompetency for this task, which I attempt solely because it is indispensable for the full comprehension of much which I shall have to bring forward later.

Let us recall, for a few moments, the thoughts which filled the minds of Gerard Groot and Florentius Radewyn when they inaugurated the Congregation of Common Life. In the first place, it was designed that its members should endeavour, from their hearts, to return to the life of the early Christians; to such a life as the Apostles led when following our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, and which they and their companions carried out after His ascent into heaven. All were to live in common, to work for the general good, to hold their worldly possessions in community, and to spend their leisure hours in prayer and works of charity. This grand idea of returning to the Apostolic life constituted the tie which held together the earliest members of the little band of scholars congregated under the guidance of Gerard and Florentius. The necessities of those times, before the invention of the art of printing, rendered the work of transcribing books

a leading occupation, and one both needful and profitable. All, however, were not suited for such an avocation; but in the new community there was employment sufficient for every one, whatsoever his or her capacity or training might be. The spiritual guidance of the Augustinians was superadded by Groot as a necessary means of binding together in the holy obligations of religion the crowds of laity who flocked to enter the new Congregation.

Such were the designs of Gerard and Florentius. Can we imagine a more sublime idea than this effort to rise from the degraded wickedness of the period of which we write—to submerge all selfish interest, all ambition, all worldly consolation, in seeking to imitate the life of those who followed Christ on earth, and abandoned all things for His sake? As a matter of course, the noble spirit and thoughts which inspired its founders permeated to the core the new institution, and leavened its teaching and writings. We have seen what manner of man Groot was. We have also seen how worthy a disciple he found in Florentius, and, when we turn to the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, we meet clear evidence of the fitness of Vos van Huesden to carry on and perfect the work entrusted to him.

A little study enables us to understand the tone of the spiritual school of Windesheim, and to trace its source and development. Groot was a man of exceptional sanctity, ability, and erudition. Before he commenced his missionary life he had devoted himself, especially during his retreat at Monichuisen, to the

study of the Holy Scriptures and of the Fathers of the Church. In his famous protest against the edict which suspended him from the right to preach in public, he tells us the sources of the doctrines he taught. Not alone had he mastered the Sacred Word of God, but he had also familiarized himself with the interpretations of all the great teachers of the Church—Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Dionysius, Bernard, Bede, Isidore, Hugo, and Richard. Their works, as he tells us, were his chosen riches on earth.*

When Gerard visited Ruysbroeck at Groenendaal, he was so edified by his sanctity and learning that he determined to select the order to which that great mystic belonged as the Guardian of the new-born Congregation, and it is a matter of certainty that Eymsteyn, to which the early founders of Windesheim were sent for instruction, had imbibed to a large extent the spirit of the school of Groenendaal. John van Schoonhoven, the disciple of Ruysbroeck and sub-prior of Groenendaal, had been urged by his nephew Simon, who was prior of Eymsteyn when the Windesheim brethren came thither, to give him instruction in the spiritual life. At first Schoonhoven hesitated from modesty; but he ultimately yielded, and wrote two letters, of which the first still exists, and shows clearly the absolute identity of the teaching of Groenendaal, Eymsteyn, and Windesheim. Father Becker includes

* See Life of Gerard Groot, chap. xviii., Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.; also Bonet-Maury, p. 95.

this composite spiritual school under the comprehensive title of "The Circle of Windesheim," a term which seems so appropriate and convenient that I shall frequently use it henceforth.* It would appear that its members did not seek to spread their teaching beyond the limits of their own Congregation, and hence we find no formal promulgation of their doctrines. This is only natural when we remember that their motto lay in the words of Saint Augustine, "Ama nesciri," "Love "to be unknown." Nevertheless, they have left very numerous and characteristic fragments which preclude all doubt as to the spirit which guided them.

Amongst those relics I may enumerate a few, namely—

The Chronicle of Windesheim, by Busch.†

* L'Auteur de l'Imitation et les documents Néerlandais, par Victor Becker, S.J. La Haye: Nijhoff, 1882.

† Book i., chaps. xix., xxii., xxiv.–xxvi., xxix; also Epistola de vita et passione Domini nostri Jesu Christi, following chap. xlvii., pp. 217–247.

Book ii. I find it impossible to select references to this book, as in the case of that preceding it, because it is filled from beginning to end with an exposition of the doctrines which animated the Windesheimers, and with illustrations of the shining examples which their great men afforded. For a thorough understanding of this subject the whole of book ii. must be studied carefully. I shall make only a few leading references. From chaps. i. to ix. the general spirit and mode of life of the Order is described. From chaps. x. to xxi. we find an outline of the life and work of John Vos van Huesden, the second Prior of Windesheim, and one of the most remarkable of its members. In like manner we find from chap. xxii. to xxix. the edifying history of Arnold Kalkar. From chap. xxx. to the end of the volume we find records of the lives of many other examples of distinguished holiness—of Henry of Huxaria, Werner Keynkamp, John à Kempis, Henry Wilde, Henry Wilsen, Henry Mande, William

The History of the Founders and Earlier Members of the Congregation of Common Life, by Thomas à Kempis.*

The Letter of John van Schoonhoven to his nephew Simon.†

The Writings of Gerard Groot.‡

The Lives and Spiritual Teaching of Florentius Radewyn,§ *Lubert Berner,*‖ *John Ketel,*¶ *Vos van Huesden,*** *and Henry Loeder.*††

It is quite impossible to study these works attentively, fragmentary as they are, without forming a

Vornken, Henry Loeder, John Skutken, John Cele, and many others, whose saintly lives illustrate at every point the spirit of the school which took as its first and last lesson *the following of Christ.*

* See Sommalius' edition of the works of Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

† See Becker, pp. 174–186.

‡ See Vita Gerardi Magni, by Thomas à Kempis, and remarkable sayings of Groot, following the life; also Bonet-Maury, Appendix, and especially letters given at pp. 99 and 100; also Groot's letters to Berthold ten Have, and John ten Water, Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chaps. xxxviii. and lii.

§ See letter and remarkable sayings of Florentius, following chap. xxix. of his life by Thomas à Kempis. Also Recherches sur le véritable auteur de l'Imitation de Jésus Christ, par Monseigneur Malou, pp. 391 and following. Troisième édition. Paris: Casterman, 1858.

‖ See Devout Exercises, by Lubert Berner, following his life by Thomas à Kempis.

¶ See Spiritual Exercises of John Ketel, following his life by Thomas à Kempis.

** See Epistola de vita et passione Domini nostri Jesu Christi, following chap. xlvii. of book i. of the Chronicle of Windesheim, which Busch tells us (book ii. chap. xi. of same Chronicle) was the spiritual handbook of the Congregation, arranged by Vos van Huesden; also chaps. x. to xxi. book ii., already quoted as illustrating Vos' life.

†† Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii. chaps. lvi. to lviii., and especially his letter to the Brethren at Bodingen, contained in chap. lvi.

clear opinion concerning the phase of spirituality which pervaded the "Circle of Windesheim," originating with its founders, and carried out by their successors. Its characteristics essentially include absolute and grand simplicity, with the total absence of affectation or scholasticism, and culminate in the inculcation of the pure love of God, charity towards others, purity and humility of heart, elevation of the soul, contempt of the world, renunciation of self, and the faithful imitation of our Divine Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. A full exposition of this subject is beyond the scope of the present essay, but any one who follows the path of investigation which I have indicated must, I believe, inevitably arrive at the same conclusions to which I have been led.*

This is a most important point, and one which the reader will need to bear in mind, especially when he comes to the sketch which I shall later offer of the controversy touching the authorship of the *Imitation of Christ*. There I hope to show that it is in the teaching of the School of Windesheim that we must look for, and alone can find, a clue to the inspiration of that wondrous book.

All the works to which I have referred above are in the Latin language, and, not having been trans-

* The learned Dr. Acquoy, to whom we are indebted for a most valuable collection of letters of Gerard Groot (Epistolae xiv. Gerardi Magni. H. W. Mooij. Amstelodami: 1857), has filled no less than three octavo volumes in treating this subject. See Het Klooster te Windesheim en zijn invloed, Dr. Acquoy. Utrecht: Van der Post, 1875–80.

lated, are inaccessible to many; but I must not omit allusion to a very remarkable and learned dissertation on the spirit and influence of the Congregation of which I write, contained in the third and fourth chapters of a recently published work of the late Professor Altmeyer, of Brussels.* This erudite historian touches the subject, from his point of view, with a master-hand, and shows the extraordinary influence for good exercised both in the regeneration of the spiritual life and in the resuscitation of classical learning by the Brethren of Common Life—a power which provoked at the Council of Constance the unwarrantable attack of the envious Matthew Grabow, thereby eliciting the magnificent defence of the Windesheimers, carried to the absolute defeat and silencing of their assailant, by Peter D'Ailly, Cardinal Archbishop of Cambrai, and John Charlier de Gerson, the mighty Chancellor of the University of Paris;†—a power which at that time bade fair to rescue Christendom from impending desolation, until the convulsive anti-Catholic movement of the sixteenth century arose, equipped with all the weapons of the world, the flesh, and the devil, to crush and stamp out its formidable opponent. I might easily write a volume upon this crisis, were it not imperative that I should hasten on to the real subject of my essay—to tell the story of Thomas à Kempis, and of my visit to the scenes in which he spent his life.

* Les Précurseurs de la Réforme aux Pays-bas, par J. J. Altmeyer. Bruxelles: Merzbach et Falk, 1886.

† See also Chronicle of Windesheim, book i., chap. xli.

PART III.

WHILE the great religious movement which I have endeavoured to portray was in process of development, while Gerard Groot was evangelizing Holland by his preaching, and with the aid of Florentius Radewyn was bringing into existence the holy confraternity which culminated in the formation of the Congregation of Common Life and the founding of Windesheim, a child was born in the far east of Rhineland who was destined to occupy a glorious place in the mighty work of regeneration, and to bequeath to posterity a book and a name undying in the history of Christendom. This child was Thomas à Kempis.

In the wide expanse of country between the Rhine and Meuse, not very far from Dusseldorf, lies a small town named Kempen,* in the Diocese of Cologne, and in it there lived in those days a pious couple, John Haemerken and his wife Gertrude. Not amongst the ranks of the nobility or gentry, but in the lowliest path of life, this worthy pair earned their bread by the sweat of labour, and reared their children in poverty, and in the fear and love of God. John Haemerken

* See map at end of this volume.

was a simple artisan, and his wife no higher in rank than himself. So far as we can ascertain, he was probably an artificer in metal,* an industry specially cultivated in Kempen from time immemorial to the present day. The word Haemerken, or Haemerlein, as it is sometimes written, means in German "a little "hammer," and very likely, after the custom of those simple times, indicated his calling. In the well-known Latin editions of Thomas' works, the name is translated into "Malleolus."

This may be a suitable place to correct an error into which some of his biographers have fallen—notably Jodocus Badius Ascensius—who state that Kampen on the Zuyder Zee, near to Zwolle, was his birthplace. Thomas himself, in his *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, sets this question at rest. In Kempen, north-west of Cologne, he was born, and thence takes his name, Thomas à Kempis.†

Tradition tells us that his mother, Gertrude, kept a school for little children. If we may take the progress of her sons in holiness as an index of her solid piety, it must have been great indeed. History is clear respecting two sons of this worthy pair—John, born about the year 1365; and Thomas, who first saw the light about the year 1380. A faint rumour alludes to another son, Gobelinus, probably older than Thomas, who, like his brothers, gave himself to the service of

* Mooren, Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis, p. 32. Crefeldt: 1855.

† Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. viii.

God, and lived and died in the odour of sanctity in the Monastery of Mount St. Jerome at Hulsbergen.*

John, the eldest son, had gone from Kempen to Deventer before the time when we have any information concerning Thomas, and there, under the direction of Gerard Groot, joined the Brotherhood of Common Life.

Thomas,† born, as we have stated, about 1380, remained under the care and tuition of his parents,

* See Appendix to Rosweyd's Vindiciæ Kempenses, p. 123.

† I may enumerate here the principal sources from which I have derived the information embodied in this sketch of the life of Thomas à Kempis :—

1. His own writings, including the Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes.

2. John Busch's Chronicle of Windesheim.

3. An anonymous biographer, nearly contemporary with Thomas à Kempis. See Appendix to Rosweyd's Vindiciæ Kempenses; also Mooren, Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis, p. 195.

4. Notice of Thomas à Kempis, by George Pirckamer, Carthusian, of Nuremberg, dated 1494, in Danhausser's edition of the works of Thomas à Kempis. Also given in most of Sommalius' editions—for example, that published by Nut, of Antwerp, 1607.

5. Life of Thomas à Kempis, by Jodocus Badius Ascensius, prefixed to his edition of his works, dated 1520, and later, also given in edition of Sommalius quoted above.

6. Life of Thomas à Kempis, by Franciscus Tolensis (Francis de Backer, sub-prior of Mount St. Agnes), prefixed to his edition of The Imitation, dated 1575; also given in Sommalius' edition.

7. Life of Thomas à Kempis, by H. Rosweyd, S.J. See Appendix to his Vindiciæ Kempenses.

8. Life of Thomas à Kempis, by an anonymous writer (probably Dr. Francis Lee, the author of a work on Montanism), prefixed to the English version of some of à Kempis' works, edited by George Hickes, D.D., under the title of "The Christian Pattern." Second edition. London: 1710.

9. Vie de Thomas à Kempis, par le Rév. P. M. B. Santyves. Paris: Victor Sarlit, 1858.

10. Mooren. Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis.

aided by the teaching of the grammar school of Kempen, until he was thirteen years of age. Then he too betook himself to Deventer, to join his elder brother. Deventer, it should be remembered, besides the attractions it possessed for him from being the head-quarters of the Congregation of Common Life, amongst whom John à Kempis was enrolled, was in those days a noted centre of learning in Holland, and was much more accessible to the inhabitants of the adjacent countries than Paris or the German universities.

Let us glance at the map,* and think how the little youth—child, indeed—made the long and arduous journey from Kempen to Deventer. History tells us nothing of that pilgrimage, for such it must have been—how much he travelled by land, how much by the Rhine; but assuredly all can sympathize with the good parents in the anguish they must have felt in parting with their boy, as he set forth alone upon the wide world. So tender in years and poor in all worldly resources, the child needed an earnest faith in Providence. His good parents had taught him to trust in Heaven, and that confidence was not in vain.

Certain it is, from his own account, that to Deventer Thomas came, and sought his brother John. Disappointment awaited the youth. John had gone from Deventer and was then at Windesheim, full twenty miles away. To Windesheim he journeyed, and was tenderly received by his elder brother. Fortified with

* See map at the end of this volume.

an introduction from him to Florentius Radewyn, he returned to Deventer. He tells us how kindly that holy man received him, and all he did to provide for his immediate wants. John à Kempis was already a brilliant light amongst the Congregation of Windesheim,* and doubtless his recommendation obtained for his youthful brother a favourable reception, enhanced by the intelligence and fine disposition of the boy.

Scanty as the materials of our information about Thomas à Kempis are up to this epoch, from henceforth they are far otherwise. It is impossible to read his works attentively without finding ample details which indicate step by step his subsequent career. The difficulty lies rather in the selection of the most salient and interesting points. To begin, let us see the impression made upon the youthful aspirant by the example he beheld amongst the Congregation of Common Life. We shall take his own words :—

"Having come in my youth to Deventer to pursue "my studies, I sought my way to Windesheim, to visit "the Canons Regular there, amongst whom I found "my own brother. By his advice I was led to seek "the acquaintance of a certain curate of the Church of "Deventer, named Master Florentius, a most devout "and excellent priest, the fame of whose holiness had "spread to the northern parts of Germany, and whom "I had already been drawn to love. The crowd of "students who assembled round him when he celebrated "the Divine Mysteries sufficiently denoted the high

* See Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. xxxv.

"estimation in which he was held; for he was noble "in presence and speech, and pleasing to all beholders, "a true servant of God, an obedient and devoted child "of our Holy Mother Church. The Reverend Father "received me most kindly, and, moved by charity, kept "me awhile in his own house. He also placed me in "the school, and provided me with the books needful "for my studies. Finally he obtained for me hos- "pitality with a certain excellent lady, who treated me "and other clerics with the greatest benevolence. In "the holy company of Florentius and his brethren, I "had before me daily examples of the most edifying "kind, which excited my warmest admiration. I "reflected on the regularity of their lives, and upon "the words of grace which flowed from their lips. "Never, within my recollection, have I met such men "as those—so fervent, so pious, so animated with "charity towards God and their neighbour. Living "amongst seculars, they were in every respect wholly "unworldly, and appeared perfectly indifferent to all "things of earth. Dwelling at home in peaceful re- "tirement, they devoted themselves to the copying of "books, to pious reading and meditations, only re- "laxing their hours of labour by the utterance of "ejaculatory prayers. Every morning after matins "they assembled in the church, and there during the "celebration of Mass, prostrate in humble attitude, "they raised their hands and souls to God, pouring "forth their prayers and sighs, imploring His mercy "through the intercession of the saving Victim.

"The founder and first spiritual director of this "most excellent Congregation was Florentius Radewyn. "This great master, adorned by every virtue and filled "with divine wisdom, had truly studied the Lord "Jesus Christ, and, together with his priests and "clerics, strove humbly to imitate the manner of life of "the Apostles. All were united, heart and soul, in "Almighty God. What each possessed was given to "the common fund, and, using a frugal fare and humble "raiment, they dismissed from their minds all solicitude "about the future. Consecrating themselves with "willing hearts to the service of God, all obeyed "absolutely their rector or his vicars, and, accepting "obedience as their fundamental rule, strove with their "utmost vigour to conquer themselves, to resist their "passions, and break down self-will; all the while "earnestly begging that they should be severely repri- "manded for any faults or negligences into which they "might happen to fall.

"It is needless to say how rich in grace and in the "spirit of true devotion were these holy men. Their "words and example edified many, and the patience "with which they endured the contempt of the frivolous "moved numbers to despise the false joys of this "world. Those who had formerly scorned them and "judged their lives as ignoble and foolish, presently "converted to God, touched by conscience and experi- "encing the grace of devotion, confessed that these men "were manifestly true servants and friends of the Lord.

"Thus, crowds of men and women, despising all

"worldly gratifications, turned themselves to God, and "strove, under the guidance of Florentius, to obey the "precepts of the Church, and devoutly practise works "of mercy towards the poor. All his brethren, cling- "ing to the words of life, aided the holy master, and, "like brilliant stars in the firmament, shone forth amidst "the darkness of a decaying world. Some amongst "them, priests distinguished for sacred lore, preached "with great ardour in the churches, and by their "exhortations the faithful were instructed unto justice, "hearing the Word of God and doing good works." *

Among the many saintly companions by whom Thomas was surrounded during his sojourn at Deventer, it is easy to perceive that his heart was gained and his course directed more especially by two. These were Florentius Radewyn and Arnold Wyron, known better as Arnold van Schoonhoven. Let us see a little of what he tells us concerning these two devoted men.

Already Florentius had obtained for him a lodging and board. Not contented therewith, he supplied him with the books he required, and gave him a recommendation to his intimate friend John Boehm, Rector of the Schools, a man of rare virtue and learning, and curate of the principal church at Deventer. The youthful student had equal cause to revere the talents and the charity of this accomplished teacher. He tells us how, the time having come when the scholars should pay to their master a certain stipend, he

* See chap. i. of the Lives of the Disciples of Florentius Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

presented himself in turn, and offered the usual pension, asking in return a book, which, according to custom, he had deposited as a pledge. "*Whence does "this money come?*" asked Boehm, who already took a lively interest in his pupil. "*Master Florentius gave "it me,*" said Thomas. "*Then take back to him his "money,*" said Boehm, "*for in consideration for him "I will accept nothing from you!*" The youthful scholar brought back the money to the generous Florentius, and said, "*The Rector, from respect for "you, would accept nothing from me.*" "*I thank him,*" replied Florentius, "*but I shall find some other means "of rewarding him, so he shall not be the loser.*" *

Thomas had other gifts besides the regard of Florentius to secure the interest of his master, for he was distinguished by his ability and piety, and by a combination of happy dispositions. The first objects of his careful study were grammar, the Latin language, and the art of musical chant. He distinguished himself amongst his comrades by his attention to the instructions of his teacher, and by the facility with which he seized all his explanations. Boehm always wished his scholars to assist in the choir at the various church services, in order to take part in the sacred music. Thomas acquitted himself of this duty with great ardour, and, what gave him special pleasure, it afforded him opportunities of coming into close contact with Florentius, and of studying his virtues. This holy man, owing to delicate health, was

* Life of Florentius, Thomas à Kempis, chap. xxiv.

not always able to attend the choir; but on feast days, unless prevented by very serious illness, he was never absent from High Mass and Vespers. Thomas was struck by his modest bearing, by the precision and regularity of his singing, and by the fervour which shone forth from his countenance.

"His presence," says he, "impressed me and my "companions with a feeling of deference and repose, "and, even when his eyes were not upon us, I dared "not utter a word.

* * * * * *

"One day," he adds, "I found myself near him in "the choir, and turning towards the book to sing with "us, he laid his hands upon my shoulders. I was "seized with astonishment at his familiarity, which "seemed a great honour, and I hardly dared to make "the slightest movement.

* * * * * *

"His presence even, and his authority, had a most "salutary influence on all, for he was, as it were, a "living example to the whole choir." *

It was not alone in the choir, but also in his home and everywhere else, that Florentius showed himself a perfect model of all virtues, and Thomas lost no opportunity of receiving edification from him. At one time he admired the spirit of poverty which showed itself in the simple habits of the holy man, all the while that he could not help feeling pained at the extent to which he saw him carry the spirit of self-denial.

* Life of Florentius, chap. xi.

This man of God could not frequent the refectory, owing to his great delicacy, and hence was served at a little table in the kitchen with the simplest viands, and in very small quantity. "He often asked me," says à Kempis, "to prepare his little table, unworthy as I "was of the honour. Oh, with what happiness, with "what joy, I used to bring from the larder the morsel "of food which served him for nourishment!" *

He observed also how, by the rigour of his austerities, Florentius had lost the sense of taste, and paid no heed to what he ate. One day Thomas went to visit him when indisposed, and, being near his bed, he saw the brother in attendance (James of Viana) present to his superior a dish of spiced food, specially prepared to revive the appetite, saying, "*Take a little of this "savoury food to comfort you. Is it not nice?*" Thomas never forgot the reply which Florentius made: "*You "would enjoy a greater relish from a morsel of plain "bread than I can find in the delicacy you offer me.*" †

Every word which fell from the lips of Florentius was lovingly treasured by à Kempis. I may here quote a few of these edifying reminiscences. One day, when the holy Master chanced to find, in the room of one of the Brethren, a young man who was writing to his family, he said, "*Write in such a manner that your name "may be inscribed in the book of eternal life.*" "I never forgot," says Thomas, who overheard this speech, "these words, spoken from the fulness of his heart." ‡

* Life of Florentius, chap. xiii. † Ibid., chap. xvii.
‡ Life of Lubert Berner, par. 7.

Thomas fails not to tell us how deeply he was moved by the charity with which Florentius received the poor who applied to him, soothed the unhappy, consoled the afflicted, and visited and tended the most revolting cases of sickness.* It was a custom with him, on the feast of St. Gregory, in imitation of that saintly pontiff, to invite to his table twelve poor scholars. Thomas was sometimes entrusted with the invitations, and the duty of bringing many of those who were mentioned to him by name. All, having eaten and drank, returned rejoicing to the schools, giving thanks to God, and blessing their benefactor.†

Participating in the good and charitable works of Florentius and his companions, à Kempis exclaims, "When all the rest of the world is silent I cannot hold "my peace; on the contrary, I should wish to sing "eternally the praises of the works of mercy of which "I was the witness for seven long years."†

In order to portray with adequate clearness the manifest influence which Florentius exercised upon his disciple Thomas, it would be necessary to translate in full the life which the latter has written of his saintly patron. This is impossible in the present sketch, so I must be contented with the few extracts already given, and pass on to relate some details of the other members of the congregation by whom à Kempis was surrounded, who aided largely in moulding his youthful mind and in leading it towards the exalted perfection it ultimately reached.

* Life of Florentius, chaps. xv., xvi. † Ibid., chap. xvi.

I have already alluded to Arnold Wyron, and shall now record the story of his life in à Kempis' words.

"While the church of Deventer was adorned by "the presence of the Reverend Father Florentius, and "many scholars flocked there to prosecute their studies, "there came from the confines of Holland a youth of "admirable dispositions, free from worldly guile, Arnold "by name, the son of Wyron, a distinguished citizen "of Schoonhoven. While yet in his father's house, "attending the public school, he followed not the ways "of his companions during the hours of recreation, but "would withdraw to the church and pray before the "different altars, offering up his young heart to the "Lord who made him. These early marks of devotion "were an unerring forecast of the greater grace im- "parted to him in his manhood; for through the "mercy of God he was preserved from all contamination "of the flesh. Having come, as I say, to Deventer, "where John Boehm was Rector of the school, he "presented himself to Florentius with the object of "gaining admission to one of the houses of devout "clerics, of whom a large number were then living in "different dwellings under the care of this most holy "Father, following on the feast days his precepts and "counsel, and all the while labouring diligently at their "studies at the appointed times.

"Florentius found Arnold most fervently devoted "to the service of God and free from all worldly "thoughts, and received him into one of his houses, "where nearly twenty clerics were living in common,

"having but one fund, one table, one habit, and serving "God with the utmost devotion. Among these were "three lay brothers, one of whom was procurator and "provided what was necessary for the community, "another acted as cook, and the third as tailor. From "that house in after-times some entered the order of "Canons Regular, some were promoted to the priest-"hood, spreading abroad the good fruit they had "gathered and stored up in Deventer.

"About the same time, by the advice and assistance "of Florentius, I entered that house, and for nearly a "year Arnold and I dwelt there together in close "companionship, occupying the same small room and "the same bed. There I learned to transcribe, to "read the Holy Scriptures, and to attend to all that "concerned our conduct and the spiritual works. I "was instigated more and more to the contempt of "worldly matters by the sweet converse of the brothers, "and the holy advice which Arnold gave me daily. "Whatever I then earned by transcribing I handed "over to the common fund, and whatever I needed "was supplied in the most paternal way by the far-"reaching charity of my well-beloved Father Florentius.

"I witnessed many marks of devotion in Arnold, "who was most exemplary in the house and in the "schools, neither forward nor troublesome to any one, "but pleasant and affable in all things. At four in the "morning, at the sound of the bell, he rose at once, "and on bended knees made a short prayer and offered "to God his first utterances of the day. He dressed

"immediately, and, not wishing to delay the others, "hastened to the appointed place for the recital of the "Matins of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy "Cross. He always desired to be one of the first at "Mass, and assisted thereat with reverence and "humility, on bended knees before the altar, in deep "prayer and meditation until the very end. He sought "retired places where he could not be interrupted by "the crowd, and the more alone he was the more "fervently he prayed. He kept away from others lest "his devotion might be noticed. He was careful not "to raise his voice, for in the secrecy of his prayers he "wished to open his heart to God alone. Yet it was "not at all times possible for him to conceal himself, "because a burning lamp will shine forth even against "the will.

"It happened sometimes that I succeeded in hiding "from his view and observing how he behaved while "engaged in prayer. His fervour so excited me "that I longed to feel the same devotion which "appeared to be habitual in him. Nor is it to be "wondered at that he should be so devout in his "prayers, who, wheresoever he was, kept so close a "guard upon his heart and mouth. In consequence "of the exceeding sweetness of his devotion, a joyous "sound might be heard in his throat, as if he had been "tasting some delicate food; as in the words of the "Psalmist: '*The high praises of God shall be in their* "'*mouth.*'*

* Psalm cxlix. 6.

"Sitting in the school among the pupils, he heeded "not their youthful mirth. While the teacher lectured "he wrote down the discourse upon his tablets; and "would afterwards go over it by himself, or with a "schoolfellow, avoiding all idle conversation. He was "not taken up with what passed around him, but when "his lesson was mastered he read a page in Holy "Writ, or prayed silently, or made ejaculations, seeking "God in all his studies. If he lighted upon anything "worthy of notice he showed it to his companion, or "gave it to him to read; and thus by means of the "Sacred Volume and his pious conversation he drew "many from frivolous and unprofitable ways. On "feast days he led many companions, whatever might "be their age or proficiency, to Florentius' house, to "hear the sermon, in the pleasing hope of promoting "their conversion. Nor was he disappointed in his "expectation, for God permitted him to witness the "fruit of his exertions in the improved habits of both "young and old. His discourse and exhortation had "no reference to high subjects or to outward trans- "actions, but to real conversion to God and the "correction of those living in the world. He did "more good by the simplicity of his pious words than "by the niceties of the Latin language.*

"Having acquired sufficient knowledge in the "schools, he devoted himself wholly to spiritual studies, "forgetting home, parents, and country for the sake "of the future life, and subjecting himself with ready

* Imitation of Christ, book i. chap. i. [F. R. C.]

"obedience to the discipline of the clerics, in accord-
"ance with the praiseworthy regulations of the Mother
"House, as laid down in the first instance by the pious
"Florentius. He aimed not at acquiring much science,
"but sought rather a good conscience * and purity of
"heart, knowing that blessed are the clean of heart
"and most pleasing to God. By-and-by he began to
"entreat and beg fervently that he might be permitted
"to spend the remainder of his life in the house of
"Florentius, desiring nothing more than the com-
"panionship of such devout and God-serving brethren,
"obedient to and guided by this most venerable
"Father. For at that time were still alive those
"whom I have already mentioned, the beloved dis-
"ciples and most devout pupils of Florentius—namely,
"Lubert, Henry, Gerard, Amilius, James, John Ketel,
"and others, who in the beginning settled in that house,
"and, burning with the love of Christ, offered to the
"world an example of the influence of His light. The
"well-beloved brother, Arnold, longed to be united
"with these in their humble sanctity of life, persuaded
"that it would be happy for him to live the rest of
"his days in holy celibacy with these disciples of
"Florentius. Although he was persistent in his re-
"quest, the holy Master postponed granting it, in order
"to prove him the better, and said to him, '*Learn to*
"'*write well, and there will be some hope.*' Hearing
"this, he applied himself with the utmost diligence to

* Imitation of Christ, book i. chap. iii.; also book ii. chap. vi. [F. R. C.]

"acquire the art of writing, and frequently sought "instruction from an expert. He said to me, '*How* "'*I wish I could write well in order the sooner to gain* "'*admission to Florentius' house! I hope that if I* "'*could do so I would try, by the grace of God, to* "'*subdue my passions.*' I was lost in admiration at his "good disposition and fervour; for he was using his "utmost endeavour to do what Florentius wished. "On my own part, I thought within myself, 'I too "'should wish to learn to write if I could amend my "'life.' Arnold truly had a special grace from God "which directed him to every good work and rendered "obedience an easy duty. He endeavoured to cherish "that grace by holy exercises and constant prayers, "lest he should be accused of having received it in "vain. Before he read or began to write he made a "short prayer, raising up his thoughts to God; and "in like manner when his work was ended he gave "thanks. On leaving the house or returning to his "room he would bend his knee before the figure of "our Saviour, and praying and bowing he would go "to his avocations.

"At each hour when the bell rang, he said an 'Ave "'Maria,' or some such prayer. While he was still "attending school, if he found the door of the church "open he went in, if time permitted, before or after "class-hour, or at least he bowed towards the church. "He was careful to carry out the good practices pointed "out by the elders, and to omit nothing knowingly. "He was grateful for being admonished about small

"matters, and strove earnestly to amend. Whatever "direction he received from the Superior or his "Deputy, he looked upon as coming from God; and "forbore all discussion and inquiry regarding the "message; consequently he enjoyed great inward "peace, and was beloved by God and men, joyfully "and readily carrying out, for the sake of the Lord, "the orders given to him.*

"On the approach of great festivals he prepared "himself with special devotion for Holy Communion. "He used to say, '*A great feast is at hand, let us make* "'*due preparation for the reception of the Lord;*' or "again: '*This is the feast of such a saint, let us earnestly* "'*implore his intercession.*'

"On one occasion, when one of the young men was "consulting Florentius regarding the sin of vanity and "its remedy, Arnold happened to pass near them. "Florentius, pointing to him, said to the youth, '*What* "'*is your opinion of this brother? Is he imbued with* "'*vanity?*' '*I think not,*' said the youth. '*I too* "'*believe,*' replied Florentius, '*that what you say is* "'*true.*'

"Arnold's wish had been deferred for nearly a "year; he had been sufficiently tried, and the con- "stancy of his desire to be admitted to the brotherhood "had been evidenced by his patient waiting, when "Florentius granted his request, and received him "amongst the brothers. To him this was indeed great

* Imitation of Christ, book i. chap. ix.; also book iii. chap. xxiii. [F. R. C.]

"joy, and a motive for exceeding gratitude to the "Almighty. As if he were newly converted and called "to a state of greater perfection, he applied himself "to his duties with fervour and humility, and was to "others a pattern of virtue and ready obedience, re- "laxing in nowise from the pristine devotion and the "good practices pointed out to him by the older "brethren. With his whole heart he followed the "rule, and by daily renewing his resolutions he "strengthened himself in virtue, according to the words "of the Apostle: '*And be renewed in the spirit of* "'*your mind.*'* He put off all indolent habits. He "was always ready to watch and pray, and most "diligent in copying; and in the spirit of piety and "charity he most zealously remonstrated with the "negligent.

"His will in all things gave way to that of his "Rector, whose deeds and words he meekly accepted "as coming from Heaven, and thus, not only in his "youth, but even to the end of his life, he showed him- "self submissive and obedient as a guileless child. In "dress, in speech, in conduct, he was humble and "reserved, always putting the most favourable con- "struction on what might seem in others either "eccentric or defective. He sought the lowest place, "not through affectation but by choice. Some are "weighed down by humiliations, but he felt aggrieved "if they were withheld. With the brethren he was "cheerful yet moderate, he did not speak much, but

* Eph. iv. 23.

"kept guard over his lips, and gave utterance only to "what would edify. He much preferred to listen than "to teach. He was zealous and faithful at his work, "and frequently rose during the night to assist the "brothers who laboured in the brewery. Before the "hour appointed for transcribing he would prepare "the pens, that he might commence the more quickly "and contribute better to the common profit. He "thus strove to regulate all his actions, lest through "him others should suffer instead of being benefited.

"It was his constant object not to live upon the "labour of the Congregation, and hence he willingly "undertook the common outdoor works. Inasmuch "as he could earn but little by transcribing, he had "recourse to his father, who sent a yearly contribution. "On the death of his parents, he had resolved to make "over to the brotherhood the inheritance to which he "was entitled, but death prevented his carrying out "this intention. Having determined to go home, to "make arrangements concerning his property, he "reached Zutphen, where the brothers were then "residing, and shortly after the feast of Saints Philip "and James he fell ill. His journey was therefore "arrested, lest at the hour of death he should be "farther away from the Congregation.

"Although he felt himself getting worse, he did "not keep his bed, and on the feast of Saint Wyron, "Bishop, the very day before his death, he made up "his bed, and on the following day, the feast of Saint "Gengulph, Martyr, having settled his affairs, about the

"hour of vespers he received the Holy Viaticum and "was anointed. Towards evening, finding himself "very weak, he asked that the brothers should come to "him, and recommended himself earnestly to their "prayers. He begged of them to send word of his "death to a holy virgin in Schiedam, Lydewige by "name, of whose long suffering many wonderful things "were related, whom he had visited on one occasion "when he was in Holland, and who had promised to "pray for him. Having spoken thus he lay, collected "in mind, until the tenth hour of the fading day. In "this his last hour he showed no regret, but declared "that he was ready, and gave up the ghost seemingly "without much pain in presence of the brethren, who "were praying devoutly for him. He had been "associated with the brotherhood from his youth as a "true worshipper of God and a devout lover of Christ, "and had spent thirty-one years in the Congregation "in the humble condition of Cleric. This sweet lov-"able brother died in the year 1430, on the 9th day "of May, in the city of Zutphen, in the province of "Guelderland, and was buried in the cemetery of the "Blessed Virgin Mary on the east side of the church."

I must not here omit an account, imperfect though it must be, of some others of the saintly brethren at Deventer, whose lives are recorded by Thomas à Kempis. I shall be as brief as possible, only regretting that the limits of this sketch prevent me from translating our author's words in full, as I have done in the instance of Arnold van Schoonhoven.

John Gronde, a holy priest, a native of Twenthia, was renowned in Holland for his eloquence and for the purity of his life. At the earnest request of Gerard Groot he came from Amsterdam to Deventer, where he resided in the house of Florentius, and there, with the other brothers, followed the rule of the Congregation of Common Life. He preached constantly at Deventer, likewise at Zwolle, where crowds flocked to hear him. He was noted as a most enlightened confessor, and in that capacity visited the sisters of the Congregation at Zwolle, and also the brothers at Mount St. Agnes, strenuously exhorting them to follow our Lord with true humility. His life was extremely mortified, and zeal for the salvation of souls was his one absorbing thought. He died in the year 1392, and was buried in the Church of our Blessed Lady at Deventer, in the same tomb with Gerard Groot.

Lubert Berner was the son of a merchant of high position in Zwolle, and received an excellent education at Prague, where he earned distinction by his scholarship. Resolved to enter the service of God, he came to Deventer and placed himself under the guidance of Florentius, giving to him his entire fortune. With this money Florentius built a new house for the Congregation of Clerics, in the year 1391, the same year in which Lubert entered the priesthood.

From the moment of his ordination the one aim of this holy man was to be a worthy minister of Christ.

The great sanctity of his life earned for him universal esteem, and made him the trusted friend of his companions in religion—Amilius van Buren, Henry Brune, John Ketel, and many others. He was especially skilled in caligraphy, and à Kempis relates an anecdote which not improbably has reference to himself.* He tells us how a certain young man once asked Lubert for a sample of writing to copy, and received the following encouraging reply: "*You will "make good progress in this art, for you have long and "flexible fingers.*" "By the grace of God," adds Thomas, "his prophecy is fulfilled." The good priest, wishing to combine spiritual advice with his teaching, took for the subject of his text the words of our Lord, which he traced in bold letters: "*Take up My yoke upon you, "and learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of "heart; and you shall find rest to your souls. For My "yoke is sweet and My burden light.*" †

I have already alluded to the spiritual exercises of Lubert Berner, which follow his life as written by à Kempis. He died in the year 1398, of the plague which then raged at Deventer, and was buried in the cemetery of St. Lebuin's Church.

John Brinkerink, of Zutphen, was a well-beloved disciple of Gerard Groot, and frequently accompanied him when he went to preach in various places. Being ordained, by the providence of God he succeeded Gronde as spiritual Director of the Sisters, and

* See Appendix B.

† Matt. xi. 29, 30.

filled that office with great zeal and discretion for the space of twenty years. Under his direction the number of Sisters increased, and among the new houses founded by him there was one where the Community observed the rule of enclosure. He was an eloquent preacher, and, like Groot, boldly denounced the vices of the age. After a virtuous life, spent entirely in the service of God, he passed to his reward in the year 1419, and his body was interred in the Monastery at Diepenvene, near to Deventer.

Henry Brune was born in Leyden, and belonged to a family of good standing. At an early age he left the world to enter the service of God, and came to dwell in the house of Florentius, where his humility, obedience, and charity gave universal edification.

It is related that one day while he was celebrating mass, a pious person, who laboured grievously under a dreadful temptation against faith, happening to be present, beheld in Brune's hands, at the moment of the Elevation, the Divine Child distinctly present, and from that moment was delivered from his affliction.

The sweet amiability and purity of Brune's life, together with his extraordinary zeal for the salvation of souls, caused him to be held in warm affection by all who knew him. À Kempis relates a touching story to illustrate his charity towards others:—One day when he was setting forth with the brothers for Arnheim, to gain an indulgence, some one asked him,

"*For what wouldst thou give thine indulgence?*" "*I would willingly relinquish it,*" said he, "*for grace to win to repentance every sinner to whom I preach.*"

This holy priest died in 1429 of the plague, at Zutphen, in the forty-fourth year of his sacred ministry, and was buried in the cemetery of St. Walburga in that city.

Gerard of Zutphen was remarkable for his holy life, deep study, and profound knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures and Fathers of the Church. Having come in his youth to Deventer to attend the schools, he made the acquaintance of Florentius, and through sincere attachment to him was led to abandon the world to live for God alone. By profound humility, assiduous prayer, and meditation, he attained the highest perfection of the interior life. Much of his time was devoted to study and the care of the library, the remainder to guiding those who came in large numbers to consult him about their spiritual difficulties. He was the author of several treatises on ascetical subjects,* and enjoyed the special confidence of Florentius, Lubert Berner, Amilius van Buren, and others. Returning from a journey, he stopped at Windesheim to pass the night, and there fell sick and died most peacefully, in 1398, aged thirty-one years.

* I have seen a copy of his works in the hands of the Rev. Pastoor Roelofs at Zwolle. Two of his treatises are published in the "Maxima Bibliotheca Veterum Patrum," by De la Bigne. Lyons: 1677, vol. xxvi. p. 234.

His body was interred, with honour, at the entrance of the Church of Windesheim.

Amilius van Buren, of whom we shall now say a few words, was the immediate successor of Florentius Radewyn, and consequently second Superior of the Congregation of Common Life at Deventer. Born of noble parentage, in the province of Guelderland, he came quite young to Deventer to pursue his studies. Gifted with subtle intellect and great industry, he made rapid progress, and would certainly have achieved a distinguished career had he not abandoned the world and all things therein, to follow in humility the footsteps of our Lord. Florentius loved him dearly, trusted him implicitly, and on his death-bed confided to him the charge of the new Community. Humility and charity were his leading characteristics, and it was only through obedience that he, who always sought the humblest offices, was induced to obey the wishes of the dying Florentius. À Kempis tells us of Amilius' visit to Mount St. Agnes, and of the edification he gave there. He adds a touching account of his death,* and also of his exhortation on the subject of charity.† Amilius died at Deventer in 1404, and was buried in the cemetery of St. Lebuin.

James of Viana was a man of remarkable force

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, p. 164.

† Life of Amilius Burensis. Thomas à Kempis, vol. iii.

and solidity of character, filled with humility, compunction, and interior light. He constantly subjected himself to the strictest examination of conscience, and sighed and wept over his smallest defects. Obedience was with him a duty so exacting that he observed it alike towards the lowliest and the highest. He was timid about advising others, not deeming himself worthy of such an office, but was ever ready to console those in affliction. "Remember," said he to a young brother in distress, "the words of the "Psalmist, '*According to the multitude of my sorrows* "'*in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my* "'*soul.*'" *

It was with the greatest difficulty that he consented to accept the priesthood, and only when compelled by obedience to Florentius. His idea of happiness in religious life was that each one should be truly humble and consider himself the very least of all, for to such only is the cloister a veritable paradise. James of Viana was an expert copyist, and devoted much time to that work and to the care of books. So austere was he to himself that Florentius was frequently obliged to restrain his ardour in mortification. After a life adorned by a multitude of good works, he fell sick, and died in the year 1400. His remains were interred in the cemetery of St. Lebuin.

John Ketel, otherwise Kessel, or Cacabus, is the last of the brothers of Deventer whose lives have been

* Psalm xciii. 19.

immortalized by the pen of Thomas à Kempis. There is scarcely amongst all a more remarkable or edifying history than that of this holy man, who, renouncing the world, amidst brilliant successes, devoted himself to the humble office of cook to the brethren at Deventer. À Kempis knew him intimately, and records his life in words of loving tenderness.

John Ketel was born in the city of Duseborch, near Wessel, on the Rhine. He lived at Dordrecht, and was engaged in mercantile pursuits. However, amidst his prosperity, the still small voice of conscience called him from the world to enter the special service of God. At first he intended to aspire to the priesthood, and in anticipation purchased gorgeous vestments for the holy office. By-and-by an extraordinary grace was accorded him, enabling him through humility to renounce the desire of taking holy orders, and to devote himself to the duty of cooking for the brothers in the house of Florentius. His special favourites amongst the Saints were St. Alexis, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Elizabeth of Hungary—all ardent votaries of holy poverty. In the lowly office he had chosen he spent the remainder of his life, full of piety, humility, and charity to the poor, the edification of all, and a wondrous illustration of the grace of God. He died in 1398, and was buried near many of the brethren, in the cemetery of St. Lebuin. It was of him that Vos van Huesden said, "*Would that I might die with such a man, and in such dispositions.*" His saintly life, as told by à Kempis, is too lengthy for reproduction here.

This work, together with his spiritual exercises, will repay careful perusal.

Such were the men by whom à Kempis was surrounded while a student in Deventer, and it is easy to perceive in every page of his loving memoirs of their lives the power which their good example exercised upon him. It is not, then, surprising that he, so keenly appreciative of all that was elevated and holy, should yearn to devote himself to the life he painted in such glowing colours. This desire seems to have been greatly excited by a dream which he relates, and of which he was probably the subject, although he does not expressly say so. He tells it in these words—

"A certain 'devotus' amongst the disciples of "Florentius had during the night a vision, which at "first caused him vivid terror, but ended by filling his "heart with a marvellous joy. It appeared to him "that a fearful storm, coming from the north, devas-"tated the earth; the end of all things appeared at "hand. Seized with fright, the young man sought for "some safe place where he might conceal himself for "protection. Just then he saw in the heavens the "image of the Cross and the crucified Christ, and from "it shone forth rays of light which illumined the whole "universe. As this image appeared in the sky the "tempest subsided. Meantime the Cross moved in "the direction of the home of Florentius, the habitation "of those who in real truth adored it and for its sake "contemned the world. As for this house, it shook,

"tore itself from its very foundations, and leaned "towards the Crucifix, as though to repose in adora- "tion before it. The Cross still advanced and "proceeded to fix itself upon the wall opposite the "entrance. At this moment the youth stretched out "his hands in supplication, calling on the Saviour for "protection against the terrors of the last judgment. "Suddenly an unseen power raised him up and stationed "him in the porch, as though to place him in safety "under the protection of the crucified God.

"Enchanted to find himself all at once out of "danger, the youth was so transported with joy that "he awakened from sleep, and thanked God for having "in so clear a manner revealed to him the virtues of "this good brotherhood. From that hour he resolved "to become one of them in order to study more and "more their life hidden in Jesus Christ." *

In the year 1399 Thomas was already twenty years of age, and had spent seven at Deventer under the guidance of Florentius and in companionship with his disciples. Now, as he himself tells us, he betook himself to the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, where his brother John was Prior, and earnestly besought admission. This was the year preceding the death of Florentius, and we have reason to believe that this step was taken by his advice and under his direction.†

Certain it is that he was admitted, and there com-

* Life of Florentius, chap. xxi. See Appendix B.

† Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, p. 137.

menced the long career of religious life which ended only with his death in 1471. There is some uncertainty as to the exact time in 1399 when Thomas entered Mount St. Agnes. We know from himself that it was either in May or September. He tells us how on his way to the monastery he went to Zwolle to gain the indulgence offered by Pope Boniface the Ninth to all who contributed towards the building of the Church of St. Michael in that city, and as the days fixed for the indulgence were the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross and the Feast of St. Michael (in May and September respectively), we know that it must have been about either of these dates he entered.*

We may imagine the joy with which the brothers met on this touching occasion, realizing the words with which Thomas opens his first sermon to the Novices: "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren "to dwell together in unity.*" †

The holy youth had now accomplished his heart's desire. Already he is amongst the Congregation whose members had so profoundly edified him. He has bidden adieu to the world and all its empty passing glories. He has heard and obeyed the words of our Divine Lord: "*If any man will come after Me, let him "deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*" ‡

Having traced the career of Thomas from his childhood in Kempen to his arrival and education at Deventer, I come to a very trying portion of my task.

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. viii.

† Psalm cxxxii. 1.

‡ Matt. xvi. 24.

Any one who has closely studied à Kempis' life, from the time when he entered Mount St. Agnes until his death over seventy years later, will understand the difficulties which beset the biographer whose space is limited. Barren of exciting incident as that long career undoubtedly is, it embodies, nevertheless, a marvellous story of spiritual vocation, temptation, struggle, victory, and glory. The real life of à Kempis is not to be found in the trite words of his historians. It can only be realized in the study of his voluminous and beautiful works.

To follow in detail the mental processes which carried him, step by step, to the heights of mystic spirituality would fill volumes, and need the reproduction of many of his writings. Such a design is at present out of the question. We can only touch, here and there, upon salient landmarks to illustrate his progress.

Thomas, entering Mount St. Agnes in 1399, was, as he tells us, invested as a member of the Order in 1406.* According to the continuator of the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, he was ordained seven years later, in his thirty-third year.†

It is quite possible, with a little labour, to trace à Kempis' spiritual progress in his works. The difficulty lies in selecting illustrations from the boundless field of choice. The earlier stages are pictured in

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. x.

† Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxix., portion subsequent to the death of Thomas à Kempis, p. 137.

The Soliloquy of the Soul; its later development, when he had entered the priesthood, appears in the Fourth Book of *The Imitation of Christ;* and his final ascent into the realms of mysticism is manifested in the opening chapters of his almost unknown essay on *The Elevation of the Mind.**

I hesitate to attempt an exposition of these mental phases through which à Kempis evidently passed, both on account of the time it would occupy, its small interest for the general reader, and last, not least, the difficulty of the task; yet I cannot resist the temptation to show briefly how obvious these stages are.

To begin, I shall make a few extracts from *The Soliloquy of the Soul*, from chapter xv. to the end, with a view to illustrate the phases of vocation, temptation and struggle, victory, and thanksgiving:—

"Behold, He my bridegroom, my most beloved, "my Lord Jesus Christ, the lover of holy souls, not "being able to cease from loving, attracted me, a poor "miserable creature, to Himself; and even when I "existed not He gave me life, understanding, and the "enjoyment of this common light. He moreover con- "ferred upon me the power to be born again through "the grace of baptism, and clothed me with the glory "of His merits.

"After this, when I had deformed myself with "many sins, and thus had become unfit to render Him "love for love, He looked not on my defilement, but "into the bosom of His own mercies. For He called

* Works of Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

"me by His grace when I was wandering farther "and farther away; not suffering me to perish in "the world. Then He provided me with a haven "wherein to rest awhile, so long as I am to live in this "frail body.

* * * * * *

"Moreover, He was not wanting to me in my "divers necessities; and He helped me especially in "the first temptations and assaults of my enemy. "Frequently also hath He instructed me with useful "discourses, confirming me in His word. And as "new plantations are watered with showers, so likewise "He bedewed me with internal consolations; lest the "virtue which was commenced in me should become "dry.

"And He said to me: 'If thou shalt be willing and "'hear Me, then shalt thou see every good thing. If "'thou shalt do the things that I bid thee, then shalt "'thou be My best beloved. If thou shalt choose Me, "'and love Me above all things, then shall there be "'granted to thee from the Father all whatsoever "'thou askest. But if thou leavest Me, then all shall "'be to thee a stumbling-block, and I will set My "'anger against thee. And when thou seekest after "'another to love, he shall not long please thee, but "'be turned against thee in weariness and bitterness, "'because I alone am the Salvation and Life of the "'soul.'

"Then I turned unto Him who had done so much "for me, and shaking off the dust of earthly affection,

"I resolved in my heart to live the rest of my life "wholly in Him, since nothing is better than He, nor "is there any method more salutary than His.

* * * * * *

"For He knew what was expedient for His new "plantation, and of what benefit this tenderness of His "might prove hereafter to me, principally in the time "of my probation which was at hand; that hence I "might easily recollect what great things He had done "in the beginning for my soul; and therefore that I "might not faint in the coming battle. Neither did "He as yet make known to me what and how much I "should suffer in His service, but, considering the "weakness of the tender shrub, He sometimes mingled "sadness with joy that so I might become strong and "able to endure.

"Afterwards He led me about, and taught me, and "carried me on His shoulders. He brought me through "the pastures of His holy writings, and armed me "with strength against the treachery of the devil. "He showed to me the patterns of all virtues, the holy "Patriarchs and Prophets, together with the glorious "lights of the New Testament. He led me through "the desert and tabernacles of Egypt, where the great "Order of Anchorites and Cenobites first flourished "and increased, and by their example proved that the "yoke of the Lord is sweet and His life to be imi-"tated, and that the broad way of the world is bitter "and deceitful. He taught me, as a mother teacheth "her child, breaking for me the spiritual shells, and

"putting into my mouth the kernels, because they were "sweet to feed upon.

* * * * * *

"He dealt with me therefore, not according as I "deserved, but according to the immeasurable con- "descension of His good will towards me, as in all "things did seem meet to charity and to His infinite "goodness." *

* * * * * *

"But, that a trial of my love might be made, to "discover how true it was, how strong and loyal, it "was necessary that temptation should open and dis- "close this. Now I could not be tempted or tried but "as He should permit, hiding Himself a little. And "because temptation is wont to be very useful for "purification of the interior man, as likewise to the "fructification of virtues in more abundant measure, "and to the clearer perception of spiritual gifts, it was "permitted to the tempter to lay hold on me. And so "he began to exercise me. How mightily and how "frequently I was tossed by him hither and thither, "my God and my Lord, from Whom no secret is hid, "most clearly knoweth; Who was a witness of all "that passed in my heart, and to this moment be- "holdeth me and knoweth that I am nothing but a "frail earthen vessel.

"Unless, therefore, He had come to my assistance "when I was so anxiously distressed that I could

* Soliloquy of the Soul, chap. xv., Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

"hardly believe it was possible for me to live, my soul "must have gone down into hell." *

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"'Verily I am a hidden God, and in a thousand "'ways manifest Myself to those who love Me. "'Moreover, I speak also these things to the loving "'soul. I will hide My face from her for a little "'while, I will leave her for a moment that I may see "'whether she loveth Me purely. It is a great thing "'to love purely; because this is to love Me, not for "'her own sake, nor for the sake of any temporal "'profit or spiritual comfort, but for My sake, and "'herself for the love of Me and not for anything she "'can hope for from Me!

* * * * * *

"'But to love and praise Me while thou receivest "'only benefits, what great thing is that? Even "'sinners do the same. They often praise Me when "'they receive what they unrighteously desire. But "'praise is not comely in the mouth of a sinner. He "'therefore that loveth Me for the sake of benefit or "'consolation, what doth he more than the covetous "'worldling?

* * * * * *

"'Too much art thou given to consolation, and "'therefore I have a mind to prove thee and to bend "'thee to the other side, that thou mayest experience "'what thou art able to suffer, lest thou seem to thy-"'self innocent and holy. I will send upon thee

* Soliloquy of the Soul, chap. xvi.

"'tribulation and wrath and indignation; and I will
"'let loose evil angels upon thee, some whereof shall
"'take away from thee such things as are thine, and
"'others shall deny thee such things as thou needest.

* * * * * *

"'In all these and in greater than these thou shalt
"'be tried, like a mighty champion. I will retire, yet
"'I will not dismiss thee before I have examined thee
"'thoroughly, whether thou wilt bless Me only to My
"'face. But if indeed thou lovest Me with all thy
"'heart, and shalt always and upon every occasion
"'bless My name, then it is fit that thou henceforward
"'be called My spouse, and be admitted to My secret
"'chamber.

* * * * * *

"'Knowest thou not that riches gotten with labour
"'are held fast with more earnestness? To whom
"'is rest so desirable as to the wearied traveller? To
"'whom is love so pleasant as to the lover who en-
"'dureth the sorrow of restraint? Is not a treasure
"'lost and found again twice dearer than before?'"*

* * * * * *

"Tarry not therefore here, my soul, for this is not
"the place of thy rest; but go thou on still forward,
"and ascend unto Him that made thee, for He hath
"already sent messengers, and inviteth thee to come.

* * * * * *

"O thou Medicine of the sorrowful, thou bright
"Lamp of all who seek and wander. Do Thou for

* Soliloquy of the Soul, chap. xvii.

"ever shine upon me; do Thou prepare Thee a "mansion in me, till the everlasting light break forth "upon me!

* * * * * *

"Study therefore, O faithful soul, so to present "thyself to Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom, that "thou mayest always be found worthy of His grace "and consolation; for in Him thou shalt find sufficient "to comfort thee most amply in all anxiety.

* * * * * *

"O that I could but sufficiently declare and unfold "Him unto thee! How willingly would I do it! But "what is unutterable can never be expressed, and, in "like manner, what is inconceivable can never be "grasped by thought or word. Therefore, do thou "meditate, as a man, upon thy Creator, consoling "thyself with the remembrance of His sweetness, until "He show thee the presence of His countenance in "His Heavenly Kingdom." *

Having traced the workings of à Kempis' mind through the stages of vocation, trial, and triumph, let us see how he bursts out into fervent thanks to God for having drawn him from the world to embrace a religious life. Alluding thereto, he says—

"Considering all this, St. Paul exhorts his disciples "that they be not ungrateful for so great a benefit; "but that, being mindful of the Heavenly grace, they "may study to return praises worthy of so high a "calling: '*For see your vocation, brethren, that there*

* Soliloquy of the Soul, chap. xix.

"'*are not many wise according to the flesh, not many*
"'*mighty, not many noble. But the foolish things of the*
"'*world hath God chosen, that He may confound the*
"'*wise; and the weak things of the world hath God*
"'*chosen, that He may confound the strong.*' *

"These things I now consider with respect to "myself, who being unprofitable and contemptible to "this world, am, through Thy holy call, snatched out "of its wreck, and translated into Thy holy fellowship "that I may serve Thee. And that I might not fall "back again, I did freely and of my own will bind "myself by a vow; which I ascribe, not to my merits, "but solely to Thy Providence.

"For this I offer unto Thee all possible praise and "blessing; in that Thou hast been pleased to call me "by Thy grace, giving me at the same time the good "will to follow Thee and cast from me the load of my "transgressions. For Thou hast brought me under "Thy easy yoke, softening my mind by the unction of "Thy Spirit, which the world knoweth not, neither "seeth, nor understandeth. Oh, merciful God, preserve "me in this good will, and increase in me more and "more the gifts of Thy grace so long as I am in the "light of the living. This vocation I feel within "myself to be a special gift not accorded to all, but "only to those for whom it is prepared by the Father.

* * * * * *

"Therefore I am bound to render Thee high "praises for so great a benefit; and oh that I might

* 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.

"worthily respond in word and deed all the days of "my life. And I beseech Thee that for due thanks "Thou wouldst be pleased to accept my poor en- "deavours with which I desire to serve Thee, as lying "under the deepest obligations to do so. And grant "that the bounden duty of my service may radically "proceed from and finally tend to Thy good pleasure "and honour; and that my heart may never be turned "aside from the love of Thee; but that my soul and "body may together vigorously increase and persevere "in Thy most holy service as long as there is breath "within me or that I enjoy my senses or can remember "Thee. May Thy praise never depart from my "mouth, nor the abundance of Thy benefits from "my heart. And if Thy servant should come to live "many, many years, may he never therefore be luke- "warm or deterred from following Thee in humility "and subjection; for I will as devoutly and willingly "serve Thee in all times as the very first day and "hour when my heart was touched and strengthened "by Thee, that I might follow my God with a pure "and entire will.

"Nor shall any infirmity or adversity be able by "its intervention to hinder this my purpose; but, as "I now feel and in Thy hearing, my God, at this "moment do propose, so by Thy aid I desire to fulfil "what I have promised. But if, nevertheless, through "any frailty or infirmity, this resolution should happen "to be shaken (since there is no man on earth so "righteous as to live and never sin), yet I will not

"despond nor abandon Thee, but at once I will bow "the knees of my heart with deep contrition and tears, "offering up to Thee my sad and wounded conscience, "that Thou by the medicine of Thy grace mayest heal "it, and bind up more strongly my purpose than it "ever was fixed before. I will never repent me of "my good enterprise; but rather I will give thanks "for this which Thou hast once deemed me worthy "of—namely, that I did willingly consent to fight for "ever beneath Thy banner." *

Having glanced at à Kempis' account of his early progress in the spiritual life, let us now see what he tells us of the priestly state, in *The Imitation of Christ*:—

"The Voice of the Beloved.

"If thou hadst the purity of an angel, and the "holiness of Saint John the Baptist, thou wouldst not "be worthy to receive or handle this sacrament.

"For this is not due to any merits of men, that a "man should consecrate and handle the sacrament of "Christ, and receive for his food the bread of angels.

"Lofty is the ministry, and great the dignity of "priests, to whom that is given which hath not been "granted to angels.

"For priests alone, duly ordained in the Church, "have power to celebrate and consecrate the body of "Christ.

"The priest indeed is the minister of God, using

* Soliloquy of the Soul, chap. xxv.

"the word of God at the bidding and appointment of "God; but God Himself is there the principal author and "the invisible worker, to Whom is subject all that He "wills, and to Whose command everything is obedient.

"Thou must therefore rather trust God the Al- "mighty in this most excellent sacrament than thine "own sense or any visible sign; and therefore thou "art to draw near to this work with fear and reverence.

"Take heed to thyself, and see whose ministry "hath been delivered to thee by the laying on of the "hands of the bishop.

"Lo, thou hast been made a priest, and conse- "crated that thou mightest celebrate! see now that "at fitting time thou faithfully and devoutly offer up "sacrifice to God, and that thou show thyself to be "blameless.

"Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now "tied fast with a stricter band of discipline, and art "bound to a greater perfection of sanctity.

"A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues, and "to give the example of a good life to others.

"His conversation should not be with the vulgar "and common ways of men, but with the angels in "heaven, or with perfect men upon earth.

"A priest clad in his sacred vestments holds the "place of Christ, to pray to God for himself and for "all the people in a suppliant and humble manner.

"He bears before and behind the sign of his Lord's

"cross, that he may always remember the passion of "Christ.

"He bears the cross before him on his chasuble, "that he may diligently behold the footsteps of Christ "and fervently endeavour to follow him.

"He is marked with the cross behind, that he may "meekly suffer for God whatsoever adversities may "befall him from others.

"He wears the cross before him, that he may "bewail his own sins; and behind him, that he may "through compassion lament the sins of others, and "know that he is appointed to stand between God "and the sinner; and not be slothful in prayer, and "the holy oblation, until it is granted him to obtain "grace and mercy.

"When the priest celebrateth, he honoureth God, "he rejoiceth the angels, he edifieth the Church, he "helpeth the living, he obtaineth rest for the dead, and "maketh himself partaker of all good things." *

Finally, let us ponder over à Kempis' ascent to the heights of mysticism, in his essay on *The Elevation of the Mind.* I will take the second chapter, which is—

"A PRAYER

"THAT THE SOUL MAY BE DELIVERED FROM THE BURDEN "OF THE BODY, AND ALL THE IMAGINATIONS THEREOF.

"I. I beseech Thee, O my God, I conjure Thee "from the bottom of my heart, to deliver me. Eman-

* Imitation of Christ, book iv., chap. v.

"cipate my distracted captive soul—snatch it, I beseech "Thee, from all the concupiscences of the world and "imaginations of the flesh, that, by the help of en- "lightened reason, I may find Thee in myself, Who "hast moulded me to Thy precious and incorruptible "likeness.

"For, in no creature of this world doth the beauty "and likeness of Thy wisdom shine forth as in the "soul of man, which Thou hast made capable of "knowing Thee, and hast so admirably placed, by the "power of reason, above all created beings.

"Elevate, then, my mind above all earthly things, "and purify the affections of my heart.

"Renew me according to the interior man, remodel "Thy image by the sevenfold grace of the Holy "Ghost; that image which Thou hast created immortal, "invisible, and incorporeal, capable of all virtues, fit to "comprehend eternal truth, to understand itself, to use "its reason, surpassing the brute creation, dignified far "above all sensible and visible things, and formed, in "a word, to Thy very image and likeness.

"Root out and drive far away from me all that "could stain or darken Thine image, lest it become "unworthy in Thy sight or offend the eye of Thy "majesty.

"Vouchsafe by Thy love to give form to this "precious and most noble image of Thyself, to en- "lighten it with understanding and visit it unceasingly, "forasmuch as Thou beholdest it with unimpeded "clearness and dost preserve it in existence.

"Remember by what an unfathomable wisdom "Thou hast first created it from nothing, but not for "nothing; by what grand and holy purchase Thou "hast again ransomed it from the slavery of sin; and "permit not that a creature of such worth be ever "stained by mortal transgression, but defend it from "all evil, and enrich it with grace.

"Multiply in it the gifts of Thy bounty, and let "that strength which it lacks by the taint of corrupted "nature, descend upon it through the gift of Thy "grace.

"II. O Thou who art the Truth, my God of mercy, "grant me to behold Thee without the idea of bodily "form—without imagined appearance—without any "created light. Grant me to behold Thee by the "intelligence of a pure mind,—Thou who hast pro- "mised to show Thyself to the clean of heart.

"Thou hast said: '*Blessed are the clean of heart;* "'*for they shall see God.*'*

"Sublime and mighty promise, fitting for pure and "enlightened souls, who, abandoning all things of earth, "and raising themselves above what is corporeal, merit "by Thy just judgment to contemplate the light of "Eternal Truth: and who, in proportion as they recede "from created light and the influence of created things, "are rapt above themselves into the sanctuary of divine "Truth.

"Oh, what a view—what a pure intuition!—How

* Matt. v. 8.

"blessed the eye with which God, the Truth, is beheld "without images and corporeal similitudes.

"Needful it is that the heart be untrammelled, and "cleansed from all inordinate affections.

"Needful, too, it is that the mind be free from all "turmoil and imaginations of bodily surroundings, if it "is to comprehend something of the eternal boundless "light which illumineth the entire world.

"Grant me, O Lord, that '*in Thy light I may see* "'*the light.*'* Not the light of heaven or of earth, of "angels or of men, but the eternal light, uncreated, "immense, ineffable, incomprehensible, superessential, "and unchangeable.

"III. O how grievous to me is the burden of my "body. How weighty '*the law of sin in my members,*'† "which impedeth and draggeth me back from seeing "the light of heaven, the face of God's glory, from "the taste of eternal happiness, and from access to "the heavenly hosts who are surrounded and filled "with everlasting joy.

"Grant, I beseech Thee, O Lord, grace and "heavenly blessing to me Thy servant in this brief "space of time, who as yet am not worthy to drink "from that fountain overflowing with living waters "'*springing up into life everlasting.*'‡

"Come unto me, O most merciful Jesus, come "frequently; inflame me with Thy love; that I may "learn to despise all creatures and all things here

* Psalm xxxv. 10. † Rom. vii. 23. ‡ John iv. 14.

"below, and simply to seek Thee alone, the eternal, "uncreated Good, and to love Thee in true earnest, "above all things, for Thine own sake."

Such is the brief outline which the narrow limits of this sketch allow me to offer as a specimen of the spiritual aspect of à Kempis' life. If space permitted, I should wish to tarry over this theme, to show by many illustrations how completely and with what versatility he has measured the heights of spiritual elevation, fathomed the depths of human feeling, and indicated the way to perfection. I might point out his study of the virtues of poverty, humility, and patience, as taught in "The Three Tabernacles;" likewise his spiritual exercises, his ideas of true compunction, of solitude and silence, of mortification of self, of a good and peaceful life, his instruction of youth, and of the novices and brethren under his guidance. All these topics and many others are exhaustively discussed in the second volume of his works; but it is impossible to enter upon them now, and I must return to the story of his life.

As we have already seen, Thomas, having finished his earlier studies at Deventer, entered Mount St. Agnes in 1399. Six years later he received the habit, and in 1413 was ordained priest, being then in his thirty-third year.*

Many circumstances point to the years immediately preceding and following his ordination as the time

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxix., p. 137.

when he put together the wondrous book of *The Imitation of Christ*. Later we shall return to this subject.

It would scarcely repay the reader were I to reproduce at any length the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, detailing the early struggles and poverty of the new monastery,* the subsequent increase of its resources and members, their edifying lives and deaths, the indomitable courage and perseverance of its first Prior, John à Kempis,† and of his successors, William Vornken, Theodoric Clive, and others, who brought the Institution to completion and prosperity. I must even omit all account of the generous assistance given in the hour of need by earnest friends, such as Everard Eza, the skilled physician to whom à Kempis attributes his rescue from a dangerous illness. Yet his was a wondrous and touching story. Sceptic in faith, he came one day through curiosity to hear Groot preach in Deventer. Smitten by the words of the great missionary, he "who came to scoff remained to pray," and, mastered by the influence of the gifted evangelist, entered religion; and after a life devoted to the service of God and his neighbour, as pastor at Almelo, died in the odour of sanctity in 1404.‡

John Cele, rector of the schools at Zwolle, the companion of Groot's visit to Ruysbroeck, was another of Thomas' friends over whose career I would gladly linger,§ but I must not tarry. Perhaps some who may

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chaps. iii., iv.
† Ibid., chaps. viii.–xx.
‡ Ibid., pp. 15, 160.
§ Ibid., pp. 171–175.

feel interested in this little sketch will turn to the source from whence I draw, and satisfy their longing for a rare history of holy lives and deeds.

It is necessary, however, that I should direct attention here to an event which exercised a potent influence in moulding the spiritual career of Thomas à Kempis, and which I believe contributed materially towards fitting him for the compilation of the great book, *The Imitation of Christ.*

When John à Kempis, the first Prior of Agnetenberg, resigned office, he was succeeded, in 1408, by William Vornken of Utrecht, a distinguished member of the Congregation of Windesheim. Now, this new Prior was evidently, as we find by the account given of him by Thomas, and more fully by Busch, a most remarkable man.

If we turn to page 35 of the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, and chapter xxxiii. of the first book of the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, we find details concerning Vornken which forcibly remind us of *The Imitation of Christ.* In fact, it almost seems as if that book was the reflection of the holy Prior's life, virtues, and teaching. The love of poverty, contempt for all things earthly, persevering industry, and, above all, deep devotion to the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, were his leading characteristics. In addition, he was conspicuous for his profound knowledge of Holy Writ, for love of discipline, prudence in advising, patience with the afflicted, kindness in consoling the tempted, endurance in adversity, exemplary diligence in all

things, love of solitude and silence, compunction, meditation, gratitude to God for all His blessings, devotion to the feasts of the Church, relish for all things that appertain to God, trust in Providence in the hour of trouble, sympathy with the ailing, and charity in praying for the dead.

As Vornken remained Prior for seventeen years, it will be observed that he was Thomas' immediate Superior from 1408 until some years after *The Imitation of Christ* had made its appearance, and the internal evidence of similarity between this holy man and the book is irresistible and significant, adding one more link to the long chain of reasoning which, as we shall later see, points to Thomas as the author. This has been already noticed by Grube in his able history of John Busch.*

In the year 1424 John Vos van Huesden, Prior of the Mother House of Windesheim, died.† Shortly afterwards he was succeeded by William Vornken, who was transferred from Mount St. Agnes, and Theodoric Clive was elected to fill his place.‡ Although the precise date is not expressly named in the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes,* we have good reason to believe that about this time Thomas à Kempis was elected sub-prior, and undoubtedly we find him occupying that office in 1429.§

* Johannes Busch, by Dr. Karl Grube, pp. 42, 43. Freiburg: 1881.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, book i., chap. xxxiii., and also Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xix.

‡ Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xx.

§ Ibid., p. 58.

In this latter year a most grievous visitation fell upon the brethren of Windesheim, Zwolle, and Mount St. Agnes. Owing to a dispute concerning the appointment of a new Bishop,* the diocese was placed under interdict by the Holy See, and as a large section of the laity resisted the decision of the Pope (Martin V.), the brothers were subjected to persecution and obliged to fly for safety. Those from Mount St. Agnes, leaving their convent in charge of a few lay brothers, departed first to Hasselt, and thence, by a perilous voyage on the Zuyder Zee, betook themselves to a monastery at Lunenkerk, near Harlingen, in Friesland, to escape from ill-treatment, and to carry out needful reforms at their destination.† À Kempis tells us with what dispositions the good brethren of Mount St. Agnes met the great trial of banishment:—"It "is in the name of Jesus Christ, through obedience "to the Holy Roman Church, to which we all without "exception wish to remain submissive, that we have "confronted these dangers. We resigned ourselves "into the hands of God, who by His great mercy has "delivered us from the perils of the sea and con- "ducted us safely to our brethren at Lunenkerk."‡

The motive of this pilgrimage, as we have already stated, was not alone to seek refuge in a monastery

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book i., chap. xxxiv.; Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxii.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, chap. xxxiv.; Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxii. In reference to Lunenkerk, see Chronicle of Windesheim, book i., chap. xliv., p. 201.

‡ Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxii.

where a good reception was certain, but also to assist in the reform of the same house, which had already been begun, and which the Community of Mount St. Agnes happily accomplished during the time of their exile. This sad banishment lasted for three years, and was "endured with great profit to their souls, in "the name of Jesus Christ and for the Holy Church of "God." *

All did not remain at Lunenkerk. A certain brother John, one of the oldest members of the community, who, in spite of age and infirmity, wished to accompany the others to Friesland, was sent home on account of his failing health, and died in 1430.

In the following year, Thomas à Kempis was himself sent to assist his ailing brother, John, who was then Rector and Confessor at the Convent of Bethany, near Arnheim. There he remained for fourteen months, until, in the month of November, 1432, he closed his brother's eyes in the peaceful sleep of a holy death.†

I must not omit here a brief memoir of John à Kempis, of whom we have already seen a little. He was senior to Thomas by fifteen years, and had come to Deventer in the height of Gerard Groot's most brilliant success. Attaching himself to the great missionary, and his disciple, Florentius Radewyn, he became one of the earliest recruits to the Order of Common Life. Small of stature and delicate in health, he never-

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxii.

† Ibid., chap. xxiv.

theless possessed abundant energy and ability, combined with the highest sanctity. Busch speaks of him as a pillar of the new congregation, and one of its brightest ornaments. He had special talents in organizing the new religious houses, and was a pioneer in many such enterprises. We have already seen that he was amongst the first six who inaugurated Windesheim, and he discharged the functions of Superior in many of the early foundations connected therewith—namely, the Monastery of the Fountain of the Blessed Virgin, near Arnheim ; Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle ; the Pool of St. Peter, near Bommel ; the Monastery at Bronopia, near Campen ; the Monastery of the Visitation, near Haarlem ; and, finally, Bethany, where he died. Besides his capacity for these duties, he was specially gifted in literature. He was a learned antiquarian, particularly skilled in collating and correcting manuscripts, in copying, and in editing and compiling. He was a man of wise counsel and great prudence in speech, and dearly loved by Vos van Huesden.

Busch records a circumstance worthy of special notice—namely, the compilation of extracts from the works of St. Bernard by both Vos van Huesden and John à Kempis.* The significance of this incident will be appreciated by any one who has carefully studied *The Imitation of Christ* side by side with the works of the great Abbot of Clairvaux, and noted the

* See Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., p. 408. Also p. 432, for Florentius Radewyn's letter to Henry Balveren, in which he too shows his predilection for the teaching of St. Bernard.

extraordinary similarity in thought which appears in numberless places. I hope, at no distant period, to make this fact the subject of a special essay.

It may not be uninteresting to reproduce here a translation of a brief extract which Busch gives from one of John à Kempis' spiritual lectures:—"We wish "to be humble without being contemned, patient with- "out suffering,* obedient without restraint, poor with- "out want, virtuous without labour, penitent without "anguish,—to be praised without virtue, to be loved "without goodness, to be honoured without sanctity; "—but Christ our Lord neither acted nor taught thus. "He promised the Kingdom of Heaven, and gave "honour and glory to those who did violence to them- "selves and suffered injuries patiently, and He left no "evil unpunished."

Rich in good works, loved and honoured by all who knew him, John à Kempis, in his sixty-seventh year, died in the arms of his brother Thomas.†

This event took place in 1432, and just about that time the storm of persecution against the brothers subsided, the interdict was removed from the diocese (by Pope Eugenius IV.), the exiles returned from Lunenkerk to Mount St. Agnes, and shortly afterwards Thomas joined them there.

From this date until his death in 1471, he re-

* See Imitation of Christ, book ii., chap. xii., the tenth verse from the end.—[F. R. C.]

† Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. xxxv.; also Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxiv.

mained at Agnetenberg, occupying at first the office of Procurator, and later that of sub-prior, to which he was re-elected in the year 1448.* So far as we can judge from all the information available, this latter period was one of repose and of devotion to the spiritual life. We are indebted to Thomas' anonymous and nearly contemporary biographer† for the information that he was once elected Procurator, or Bursar. The *Chronicle* contains no such record; yet it seems but natural that the author of the essay *On the Faithful Steward*, even mystical as it is in certain respects, should have occupied at some time this post.‡ According to the same authority Thomas was relieved of this duty, which was uncongenial to him, and re-elected as sub-prior, in order to enable him to devote himself unreservedly to the cultivation of the interior life.

Aided by the many interesting personal details which we find in the *Memoirs of Thomas à Kempis*, written by his anonymous biographer,§ by Ascensius, Tolensis, and Rosweyd, we can easily picture to ourselves his saintly old age at Mount St. Agnes. The convent, which he remembered in its commencement in poverty and hardship, was now completed and prosperous, but those who had made it so, his own

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxvi.

† See Appendix to Vindiciæ Kempenses, p. 102.

‡ De Fideli Dispensatore, Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

§ Who states that he derived his information from the Brethren at Mount St. Agnes, who lived with and intimately knew Thomas à Kempis.

brother included, had gone to their reward. To use his own poetic words, often repeated in the obituary records of his *Chronicle*, they had "migrated," and now rested with the Lord; while he, who had taught so many to enter the narrow gate, and tread the thorny way of perfection, still lingered on earth. But what an honoured old age! "*It is good for a man* "*when he hath borne the yoke from his youth.*" * "*But they that are learned shall shine as the bright-* "*ness of the firmament; and they that instruct many* "*to justice, as stars for all eternity.*" †

We can picture à Kempis in our minds, as his portrait and the descriptions help us. A man of good figure, scarcely under middle height,‡ of dark complexion and vivid colour, the forehead broad and high, the face a little elongated,—a noble head, with elevated crown and piercing intelligent eyes; always gentle and kind, lenient and charitable to the weak, encouraging to the timid, occupied at all times with his various duties, and unceasingly at work.

We can think of him at the altar, offering the Holy Sacrifice, burning with the ardour which he infused into the Fourth Book of *The Imitation*. Again, in the choir, singing the Holy Office; standing erect—unsupported—almost raised from earth, with eyes uplifted to heaven and visage irradiated by holy awe and delight. We can imagine him as he pours the words

* Jeremias, Lamentation, iii. 27. † Dan. xii. 3.

‡ Later on I shall give my reasons for disbelieving the current statement that Thomas à Kempis was below middle height.

of consolation into the ear of the weeping penitent, or points out to the wavering the road to security.* We can picture him preaching, as he was ever willing to do, to the crowds who flocked to hear him at Mount St. Agnes.

We can imagine him surrounded by the community; silent while other topics are discussed, then bursting into eloquence when God and His saints are named, and pouring forth in a limpid torrent the words of wisdom.

Again, in the privacy of his little cell, scourging himself with a heavy discipline, and chanting his favourite hymn, *Stetit Jesus.*†

We can picture him as he walked and conversed with the brothers, suddenly feeling the inward voice of God, and saying, "Beloved brethren, I must go. "Some one awaits me in my cell." Who the visitor to his cell was we know from *The Imitation,* where we can realize his communion with God.‡

We can picture him as he comes from lauds, refusing himself further sleep or rest, and devoting the dawn of morning to his writings. Idleness he abhorred; Labour, as he tells us, was his companion; Silence his friend; Prayer his auxiliary.§

* Imitation of Christ, book i., chap. xxv.

† I regret that I have been unable, after considerable search, to obtain a copy of this hymn,—possibly it was one of à Kempis' own canticles, many of which have been lost.

‡ Imitation of Christ, book i., chap. xx.; and book iii., chaps. ii. and xxi.

§ Alia Exercitia Spiritualia, chap. xv., Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

It is easy to see from many of his writings that the Incarnation, Life, and Passion of our Divine Lord were his favourite subjects for meditation,* and he speaks in words which cannot be mistaken of the *Lord's Prayer* and *Ave Maria* :—

"Amongst all prayers and praises of the Almighty, "none is holier than the Our Father, none sweeter "or more joyful to the angels than the Hail, Mary.

"The Lord's prayer surpasses all the petitions and "desires of the Saints. For it contains most com- "pletely within itself all the sayings of the prophets "and the honeyed words of the psalms and canticles. "It asks all that is needful, it praises God most highly, "it binds the soul to Him and raises it from earth, "penetrating the clouds and soaring above the "angels."†

Thomas' special love for the *Ave Maria* is well exemplified in the story he relates in one of his *Sermons to the Novices* :—

"A certain brother was in the habit of invoking "Jesus and Mary in all his troubles and temptations. "One night in a dream he saw the devil coming to "attack him, and, having no power to escape, he com- "menced to recite in a low voice the *Ave Maria*. "Still the demon advanced, further and further, but on "hearing the holy name of Jesus instantly took flight. "The brother, beholding this, cried out more loudly,

* See Thirty-six Conciones and Meditationes, Thomas à Kempis, vol. i.

† Enchiridion Monachorum, chap. v., Thomas à Kempis, vol. ii.

"'Jesus! Jesus!' Then Satan fled so precipitately that "at last he fell and disappeared.

"Awaking from sleep the good brother was over-"joyed, and exclaimed, '*I have nothing more to fear,* "'*since with an Ave Maria I can put the Devil to* "'*flight!*'"*

Thomas had ever been an indefatigable writer, had copied books innumerable, both for the use of the monastery and for sale. He had written out the whole Bible in four great volumes, also a large missal for the use of the brothers; some of the smaller treatises of St. Bernard;† and, moreover, had composed a vast number of spiritual treatises. How truly he revered the work of the copyist we know from his twentieth Concio, in which he speaks as follows: "Verily it "is a good work to transcribe the books which Jesus "loves, by which the knowledge of Him is diffused, "His precepts taught, and their practice inculcated. "Neither can it be doubted that thou wilt be loved "by Him, and amply rewarded, if thou dost diligently "write out holy books for the honour and glory of God "and the good of thy neighbour. If he shall not lose "his reward who gives a cup of cold water to his

* Sermon to the Novices, No. xxi., ex. iv., p. 98 of edition already named.

† Rosweyd's Life of Thomas à Kempis, dated 1621. See Appendix to Vindiciæ Kempenses. Rosweyd speaks of the above as existing in his time ("supersunt etiamnum") in the Monastery of Corpus Christi, at Cologne, to which many of the treasures of Mount St. Agnes were removed for safety when it was demolished in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately they are no longer to be found.

"thirsting neighbour, what will be the recompense to "him who by copying good books opens unto others "the fountain of eternal life?" *

À Kempis' love for study was so proverbial, that when his portrait was taken he was represented sitting in the open air, the buildings of Mount St. Agnes in the distant background, while on the pages of a volume at his feet are inscribed the words, "I have sought rest "everywhere, and never found it, unless in a little "corner with a little book." I would ask the reader to turn to the frontispiece, which is an autotype from an exact copy of the "Gertruidenberg" portrait of Thomas à Kempis, now in the possession of the Pastoor Allard of that town. I am indebted for this picture to the Rev. Victor Becker, S.J., the author of one of the most important modern works upon the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, who had the copy made for me from the original, which was generously lent for the purpose by the owner. The picture is of great antiquity, possibly an original portrait. It is painted on oak, and, though very dark, is in wonderful preservation. It and the Zwolle portrait (the property of the Pastoor Spitzen, which I shall give further on) are the most authentic likenesses of à Kempis. I have had them reproduced in autotype, in order to secure the greatest possible fidelity, without reference to artistic value.

Touching à Kempis' studies, it seems very difficult to resist the temptation to discuss some of his writings,

* Thomas à Kempis, vol. i.

even though I know I should not attempt it, lest I tire out my reader still more than I have already done.

The Imitation of Christ, the best known of his compositions, represents about one-tenth of the whole. There are not a few amongst them which strongly resemble it, and fully bear comparison with that great masterpiece. I only regret they are not better known. All who study à Kempis' works must love them for their truthfulness, simplicity, and unction.

Amongst many, I may single out a few as specially worthy of attention—namely, *The Soliloquy of the Soul; The Three Tabernacles, of Poverty, Humility, and Patience; The Little Garden of Roses; The Valley of Lilies;* the treatises *On True Compunction of Heart*, and *On Solitude and Silence.* The various works intended for the Novices—namely, *The Manual for Beginners, The Instruction for the Young, The Dialogue of the Novices, The Sermons to the Novices*, and the *Discipline of the Cloister.* Also the two sets of *Spiritual Exercises, The Meditations on the Incarnation and Passion of our Lord*, the essay *On a Good and Peaceful Life*, and, last not least, *The Elevation of the Mind.*

Much as these works vary, according to the subject treated and the audience for which they were intended, the same spirit pervades them all. The same language and form of expression is employed; all are radiant with the light of Holy Writ, the ardent love of God, and charity to mankind. Unfortunately, there is no

complete English translation of à Kempis' works, but if I live I shall endeavour to meet this want.

It would be very interesting to frame a chronology for à Kempis' various compositions, although, as but few are dated, we should be obliged to seek for internal evidence of their age, whereof we find in many tolerably clear indications.

As we have already seen, *The Soliloquy of the Soul*, which the author avows in his introduction to have been a compilation, treats of the early struggles of the young religious, and naturally belongs to the first period of his life. *The Imitation of Christ* is far more mature, and did not appear until à Kempis was of middle age and in Holy Orders. It was, as I hope to show later, the collected spiritual wisdom of the "Circle "of Windesheim."

An effort has been made to discredit Thomas, the obscure monk of Mount St. Agnes, as the author of the book, because, as we know, it suddenly became known throughout Europe about the end of the first third of the fifteenth century. This fallacy is due to oblivion of facts. If we turn to the *Chronicle of Windesheim* (book i., chap. xli.), we find an account of the remarkable impression made at the Council of Constance (A.D. 1414–1418) by Vos van Huesden and his companions. Collateral evidence goes to show that it was about this period that Thomas was engaged in putting together the book of *The Imitation of Christ*, and it is but natural to suppose that the Windesheimers brought with them to the Council whatever portions of

their precious manual existed, and thus gave it a wide notoriety.*

Three manuscripts still exist in Thomas' handwriting, of which two to some extent determine the dates of certain amongst his works. Of these the first is the celebrated codex of 1441.† It contains *The Imitation*, and several other spiritual works, amongst which the principal are—*The Discipline of the Cloister*, *The Spiritual Exercises*, *On a Good and Peaceful Life*, and *The Elevation of the Mind*. We know, therefore, from this manuscript, that these treatises were written before 1441. The manuscript of *The Imitation of Christ* contained in this collection is either a transcript of that work, later than the original, or more probably the original itself, which may have been written many years before it was bound up with the remaining treatises in the volume. The Pastoor Spitzen gives many solid reasons for this hypothesis.‡

Another manuscript of Thomas, bearing the date of 1456, also exists.§ It contains the *Meditations on the Incarnation*, *The Monk's Alphabet*, and a short essay in Dutch, *On Hearing and Speaking Good Words*.‖ A third manuscript exists in the library of

* See Amort, Deductio Critica, pp. 51–53. Augustæ Vindelicorum: 1761.

† Burgundian Library, Brussels, Nos. 5855–5861.

‡ See Nouvelle Défense de Thomas à Kempis, par O. A. Spitzen. Utrecht, Beijers: 1884. Pages 135–169.

§ Burgundian Library, Brussels, Nos. 4585–4587.

‖ See Malou: Recherches historiques et critiques sur le véritable auteur du livre de l'Imitation de Jésus Christ, p. 389;

the University of Louvain. It is undated, and contains the *Sermons to the Novices* and the *Life of the Holy Virgin Lidewige*. Now, we know, from many observations in the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, that the care of the novices was one of the duties of the sub-prior,* and it is but natural to assume that the *Sermons to the Novices*, and the other works specially intended for them, were written during the periods when Thomas held this office—namely, before the expulsion of the brothers from Agnetenberg in 1429, and again after his re-election in 1448. Probably also *The Duties of the Faithful Steward* were written subsequent to the time when he was Procurator.

The lives of Groot, Radewyn, and the other holy brethren of Deventer, may be assumed to have been written after Thomas returned to Mount St. Agnes in 1432. The reason for this belief is that he states in the *Life of Groot*, which is the first of the series, that he had himself seen the cell at Monichuisen, near Arnheim, in which that saintly man made his retreat with the Carthusians.† Now, the only record we have of Thomas having visited Arnheim is his account of the fourteen months which he spent there previous to John à Kempis' death in 1432. Moreover, as Henry Brune died in 1429, and Arnold van Schoonhoven in 1430, it is obvious that their lives were not written previous to the latter year.

also Karl Hirsche, Prolegomena zu einer neuen Ausgabe der Imitatio Christi, vol. i. p. 291. Berlin. Carl Habel: 1873.

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., pp. 362, 372, 373, 568.

† Life of Gerard Groot, by Thomas à Kempis, chap. vi. 2.

Again, in *The Dialogue of the Novices*, chap. v., we find an account of Brother Allard, who, as we learn from the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, page 63, died in 1436, from which we may conclude that this work appeared subsequent to that period. If time permitted, I might easily point out many other indications of the dates of à Kempis' writings, but I must return to the history of his life. In his latter days, from the time of his re-election as sub-prior until his death, he would seem to have been devoted entirely to his favourite occupations—praying, reading, composing, transcribing, teaching the Novices, consoling and directing those who sought his aid, and quietly jotting down the simple records of his monastery. Meanwhile, the years rolled by in calm and peace, as the *Chronicle* tells, and Thomas was growing old. Not, indeed, that we can observe in his manuscripts the signs of weakened sight or faltering hand. It is said that he never required spectacles; and the codex of 1456, written when he was in his seventy-sixth year, is as perfect as that of 1441, and quite a masterpiece of caligraphic art.

Finally, we come to the last entry in his *Chronicle*. I will give it here in its touching simplicity :—

"In the year of our Lord 1471, on the feast of "St. Anthony the Confessor [February 12],* in the "morning after High Mass, a devout laic, named John

* It should be remembered that this date, as well as the others given in quotations from works of à Kempis' time, was actually twelve days earlier, owing to the reformation effected in the Calendar by Pope Gregory XIII., in 1582. See Catholic Dictionary, by Addis and Arnold, p. 99. London : Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1884.

"Gerlac, died. He was a native of Dese, near Zwolle, "and nearly seventy-two years old. He had lived with "us for more than fifty-three years, in great humility, "simplicity, and patience, and had endured much labour "and many privations. But, amongst other virtues "which he possessed, he was pre-eminent for taci- "turnity, so much so that often he would speak very "little for a whole day, and even in his labours he gave "to others an example of silence. Shortly before his "death he was seized with apoplexy, and became in a "measure delirious. He was buried in our cemetery "with the other laics." *

So far as we know these were the last words ever written by Thomas à Kempis. He himself died in the following May, and the continuator of the *Chronicle* records the event in these words:—

"In the same year [1471], on the feast of St. "James the Less [May 1], after compline, our Brother "Thomas Haemerken, born at Kempen, a town in the "diocese of Cologne, departed from this earth. He "was in the ninety-second year of his age, the sixty- "third of his religious clothing, and the fifty-eighth "of his priesthood. In his youth he was a disciple, at "Deventer, of Master Florentius, who sent him to his "[Thomas'] own brother, who was then prior of Mount "St. Agnes. Thomas, who at that period was twenty "years of age, received the habit from his brother at "the end of six years' probation, and from the outset "of his monastic life he endured great poverty, tempta-

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, p. 136.

"tions, and labours. He copied out our Bible and "various other books, some of which were used by the "convent, and others were sold. Moreover, for the "edification of young persons, he wrote various little "treatises in a plain and simple style, but in reality "great and important works, both in doctrine and "efficacy for good. He had a special devotion to the "Passion of our Lord, and understood admirably how "to console those afflicted by interior trials and tempta-"tions. Finally, having attained a ripe old age, he "was afflicted with dropsy of the limbs, slept in the "Lord in the year 1471, and was buried in the East "side of the Cloister, by the side of brother Peter "Herbort." *

Such is the brief outline which I venture to offer of the life of the great Thomas à Kempis. Those who long to understand his glory and true grandeur must study his spiritual works. Lowly monk as he was, we find in his career and writings the characteristics of a master-mind—of one who, having realized the greatness of God and fathomed the shallow nothingness of this world, was enabled to practise, and to teach as no other man ever taught before or since (the Apostles

* Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes, chap. xxix., p. 137. The continuator makes a mistake, or, more probably, the transcriber or printer an error, in giving sixty-three years as the period of à Kempis' religious profession. It was really sixty-five years, as may be seen by reference to the dates in the Chronicle. Historians differ as to the exact day of à Kempis' death. I have adopted the statement of the continuator of the Chronicle, who names the feast of St. James the Less—viz. May 1.

alone excepted) the *one great lesson*—that in patient suffering we must imitate Christ if we would be with Him in eternity:—

"To many this seems a hard saying: Deny thy-
"self, take up thy cross, and follow Jesus.

"But much harder will it be to hear that last word:
"'*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*'

"For they who now gladly hear and follow the
"word of the cross, will not then feel fear lest they
"hear of eternal damnation.

"This sign, the sign of the cross, will be in heaven,
"when the Lord shall come to judgment.

"Then all the servants of the cross, who in their life-
"time have made themselves like to the Crucified, will
"draw near with great confidence to Christ, the Judge.

"Why, then, fearest thou to take up thy cross,
"through which is the way to the kingdom?

"In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in
"the cross is protection from enemies.

"In the cross is infusion of sweetness from above;
"in the cross is strength of mind; in the cross is joy
"of spirit.

"In the cross is the height of virtue; in the cross
"is the perfection of sanctity.

"There is no health of the soul, nor hope of eternal
"life, but in the cross.

"Take up then thy cross and follow Jesus, and
"thou shalt go into life everlasting.

* * * * * *

"The whole life of Christ was a cross and a

"martyrdom; and dost thou seek for thyself rest and "joy?

* * * * * *

"'*If any man will come after Me, let him deny him-*"'*self, and take up his cross and follow Me.*'

"Having, then, read and searched out all, be this "our last conclusion—that through many tribulations "we must enter into the kingdom of God." *

* Imitation of Christ, book ii., chap. xii.

PART IV.

HAVING briefly reviewed the history of the times and surroundings wherein Thomas à Kempis lived, and sketched an outline of his career, I come to the least grateful portion of my task—namely, the story of the controversy which has long raged about the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, and which, after one fashion or another, has ever sought to deprive the saintly Canon of Agnetenberg of the glory of having brought the precious volume into existence. I would gladly avoid this painful retrospect, were it not absolutely necessary to show the grounds upon which I rest my belief that Thomas was the author, and thereby explain the interest I have felt in studying his life, and in visiting the scenes wherein it was spent.

Many who know *The Imitation* well, who study it constantly and love its words of holy wisdom, are unaware that it has been the subject of one of the most extraordinary controversies known in the history of literature—a controversy often heated, occasionally bitter, not always carried on with dignity or straight-

forwardness, and unhappily displaying at times evil passions which the writer of the book would have condemned emphatically. This strange contention touches the authorship of the golden treatise, and has given origin to several hundred essays more or less voluminous.

Let us see how all this came to pass. *The Imitation of Christ* appeared anonymously, as was frequent with books in those days, and very natural for the work of one who dwells on the maxim, "Love to be "unknown and valued as nothing." So far as an exhaustive investigation leads, we are drawn to the conviction that it appeared in the first third of the fifteenth century, and from that period spread rapidly and widely, being extensively transcribed and circulated throughout the monastic world. There is not the slightest evidence that it existed before the period named, notwithstanding certain untenable statements advanced to the contrary.

During the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* was distinctly attributed to him by members of his own Order, who necessarily had the best possible information on the subject. Moreover, its parentage, so far from being denied by Thomas, who certainly was not a man to borrow the plumes of others, was tacitly accepted by him when he placed it in his manuscript of 1441, at the head of a series of other treatises, which we have the strongest reason to believe were of his own composition. The world at large was left in

ignorance upon the matter, and formed its opinions according as it was led.

At an early period of its history *The Imitation* was attributed to St. Bernard. Nothing could be more natural. Some early manuscripts and editions appeared under his name.* In tone of thought it strongly resembles many of his works; but when it was discovered that it quotes St. Francis of Assisi,† who was born nearly thirty years after the death of St. Bernard, it became evident that the Abbot of Clairvaux could not have been the author. No mistake could be more excusable. Any one who studies the book closely, side by side with the works of St. Bernard, will easily understand how natural it was, from intrinsic evidence, that it should have been attributed to him.

In turn the authorship has been erroneously assigned to many others, whose claims vanished upon investigation. I shall mention first St. Bonaventure. The mistake in this case arose from the error by which the *Collationes Tolosanae,* which contain quotations from *The Imitation,* were attributed to St. Bonaventure. Subsequent examination proved that they were not his, but of very much later date.‡ Amongst the many to whom *The Imitation* was in early times ascribed, I may enumerate Thomas Gallus, of Vercelli; Henry

* Histoire du livre de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, et de son véritable auteur, par le Chevalier De Grégory, vol. i., pp. 210–213. Paris: Crapelet, 1843.

† Imitation of Christ, book iii., chap. l., last verse.

‡ See Rosweyd's Vindiciae Kempenses, chap. xii., p. 46, etc.; also Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 199–203.

de Kalcar; Landolph of Saxony, a learned Carthusian; Ubertinus de Cassalis; Innocent III.; Piedro Rainaluzzi; John Tambaco; John Charlier de Gerson, the mighty Chancellor of the University of Paris; and John à Kempis, the elder brother of Thomas.

Early in the seventeenth century a certain mythical candidate for the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* was introduced upon the stage, and all the influence and learning of the great Order of St. Benedict were put forward to substantiate his pretensions. This claimant is the so-called John Gersen, who is said to have existed, to have been a Benedictine, and to have flourished in the thirteenth century as Abbot at Vercelli in Piedmont. By-and-by we shall investigate his position.

Again, in the eighteenth century, it was suggested that the authorship might possibly be attributable to a certain English monk, Walter Hilton, who is generally asserted to have been a Carthusian at Sheen, though in reality he was an Augustinian Canon Regular of the Priory of Thurgarton. Hickes gives a full account of the grounds upon which his name was put forward.* However, Hilton's claims have not been considered sufficiently tangible to merit serious consideration, and have long since been abandoned.

In fine, I believe I may safely state that the only candidates for the authorship of the great book whose pretensions need discussion are—Thomas à Kempis, John Charlier de Gerson, and the so-called John

* Life of Thomas à Kempis, pp. lvii.–lxiv.

Gersen of Vercelli. I shall not delay over the other claimants already named, referring all interested in the subject to the ample details contained in Hickes' *Life of Thomas à Kempis*, and Kettlewell's *Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi*. A few critics have adopted a curious theory concerning the authorship of *The Imitation*, which requires notice. They, and those who share their opinion, reject all the candidates hitherto named, and argue that the author is unknown, but of date anterior to à Kempis. Their peculiar contention will be considered in due course.

Any one who intends to investigate this controversy exhaustively, must be prepared to undertake a very extended course of study, and to devote much time and care to unravelling its intricacies, and to weighing the evidence for and against the various opinions advanced. He should, moreover, be tolerably familiar with six languages—namely, Latin, Italian, French, German, Dutch, and English.

As already stated, some hundreds of essays upon the controversy have appeared since its commencement in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Wolfsgruber gives a list, in chronological order, amounting to some two hundred and sixty.* I may observe that his catalogue is by no means perfect even up to its date of 1880, and since that time some most important contributions have been added, especially those of

* Giovanni Gersen, sein Leben und sein Werk De Imitatione Christi, von Dom Cölestin Wolfsgruber, p. 254. Augsburg: 1880.

Spitzen and Becker. For my own part, I have little to add to the discussion. It may be that the observations which I shall make on the influence of St. Bernard upon the author of *The Imitation*, and the familiarity which I shall prove that the Windesheimers had with his writings, may be looked on as an additional link in the chain of evidence respecting the parentage of the book. In the main, all I propose to do is to epitomize, as briefly as I can, the arguments advanced by the most learned advocates of each candidate or theory, and then to leave it to my readers to judge for themselves. The illness and lamented death of my friend, Mr. Edmund Waterton, a very eminent authority on this topic, has delayed the publication of his exhaustive treatise upon the subject.

We shall commence by considering the claims which Thomas à Kempis possesses to the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*. Already we have seen something of his life, and of the surroundings amidst which it was spent, and can therefore understand how peculiarly capable he was of putting together this masterpiece of ascetical teaching. Trained in the school of spirituality inaugurated by Groot, Radewyn, Vos van Huesden, Vornken, and their companions, his mind became the mirror of their teaching, and transferred itself to the pages of *The Imitation*. By-and-by we shall see how completely the book reflects their doctrines. An ascetic in the highest sense of the word, he wrote for those within the cloister, and so truthfully, lovingly, and with such breadth of human

sympathy, that his words must live until the end of time.

"A solitary monk within his cell,
Whose walls did make an island of his life,
Surrounded by the waves of war and strife,
His hours obedient to the convent bell
Until the grave had closed upon his corpse.
A life secluded from the haunts of men ;
A soul that found an utterance, by the pen,
For hope and sorrow, joy and sad remorse ;
A soul that longed for purity, that taught
Man's duty was to beat down pride and sin,
To conquer passion, keep all white within,
And shun a world with dark and evil fraught.
Ages have past, yet still, amid the strife,
Is heard the music of that far-off life." *

It will be convenient to discuss the arguments which go to prove that Thomas à Kempis was the author of *The Imitation* under the following heads :—

I. Contemporary witnesses.

II. External evidence, as manifested by the manuscripts.

III. Internal evidence.

The works to which I shall most frequently refer in vindication of the rights of Thomas à Kempis are those of Amort, Malou, Hirsche, Kettlewell, Spitzen, Santini, Becker, Delvigne, and Waterton.†

* Original Verse, by W. E. A. Axon. *The Academy* (London, September 4, 1886).

† For complete references to these writings I shall ask the reader to consult the "Bibliography" following the Preface.

I.—*Contemporary Witnesses.*

It is obvious that if one or more trustworthy witnesses can be cited who knew Thomas à Kempis in his lifetime, and state unequivocally that he was the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, no reasonable person can resist such testimony. Now, this is exactly what can be done. Three witnesses who knew Thomas personally aver that he was the author, and this long before the great controversy arose upon the subject. Let us see who these contemporary witnesses were :—

John Busch.

The first is John Busch, the Chronicler of Windesheim. It will be needful to say a few words here respecting this remarkable and devoted man. Born in 1400, he entered the monastery of Windesheim, and became a Canon Regular of St. Augustine in 1420. He died in 1479, eight years later than Thomas à Kempis, having completed, in 1464 (that is seven years before à Kempis' death), the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, one of his most remarkable works, with which we are already familiar. That he was a man of rare ability and integrity is proved by the fact that when the Papal Legate, Cardinal de Cusa, undertook the reform of the monasteries of Lower Germany, he selected Busch as his companion and co-visitor. Leibnitz speaks of him in terms of warm commendation in his *Collection of the Historians of Brunswick*, adding this grand encomium: "It is manifest that

"Busch did not conceal abuses, and did not flatter "his own Order."* Again, Trithemius, the learned Benedictine Abbot of Spanheim, speaks of him in terms of high praise.†

At the commencement of his *Chronicle* Busch himself avows his good faith, explains his familiarity with the brethren of Windesheim, and tells us that what he writes he had either seen with his own eyes, or frequently heard from his seniors, or ascertained to have been regulated by the Chapter General of his Order.‡

Let us now see what this unimpeachable witness tells us concerning Thomas à Kempis and *The Imitation of Christ*. Turning to his *Chronicle*, where he speaks of the death of Vos van Huesden, we read as follows :—

"Contigit ante paucos dies sui obitus, ut duo fratres "notabiles de Monte Sanctae Agnetis prope Zwollis "ordinis nostri, dictum Priorem nostrum super certis "rebus consulturi in Windesem advenirent; quorum "unus frater Thomas de Kempis vir probatae vitae, "qui plures devotos libros composuit, videlicet; *Qui "sequitur me, de Imitatione Christi*, cum aliis, nocte "insecuta somnium vidit praesagium futurorum," etc.

In English the passage runs thus :—

"It happened a few days before his death that two "well-known brothers of our own Order from Mount

* The reader will do well to consult Dr. Karl Grube's Life of Busch, already quoted. Also Malou, Recherches, etc., p. 80.

† See note following the Dedication of Rosweyd's edition of the Chronicle of Windesheim.

‡ See Preface to Chronicle of Windesheim, p. 3.

"St. Agnes, near Zwolle, came to Windesheim to "consult with our said Prior upon certain affairs; of "whom one, brother Thomas à Kempis, a man of "exemplary life, who composed many devout books— "viz., *He who followeth Me, Of the Imitation of Christ*, "with others, had the following night a dream fore- "shadowing future events," etc.*

Such evidence coming from such a source is conclusive; but we have much more to bring forward in corroboration.

Hermann Ryd.

The second contemporary witness who knew Thomas à Kempis personally is Hermann Ryd. He, like Busch, was a distinguished member of the congregation of Windesheim. Born in 1408, he entered the monastery of Wittenberg in 1427, and was later sent to the Tyrol by Cardinal de Cusa to assist in the work of monastic reformation there. In 1447 he was sent to the monastery of the "New Work," near Halle, where he distinguished himself by his piety and learning.

In his description of the Convent of the Canons Regular of Windesheim, contained in a codex, dated 1473, in the monastery of St. Nicolas, in Passau, he writes as follows:—

"Item, Frater iste, qui compilavit librum *De*

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. xxi. Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 94; Malou, p. 76; Santini, 2nda parte, p. 49; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 226; also Becker, pp. 15–32, whose masterly vindication of the evidence of Busch I earnestly commend to the reader's attention.

"*Imitatione*, dicitur, sive nominatur Thomas, supprior "in dicto monasterio Montis S. Agnetis prope Swollis "diœcecis Trajectensis Provincae Coloniensis et distat "dictum monasterium uno milliari à Windesheim, quod "est monasterium superius, in quo singulis annis "Canonici Regulares de Provincia Coloniensi, Mogun- "tinensi, Trevirensi celebrant Capitulum Generale. "Vixit autem hic compilator adhuc anno 1454. Et "ego Frater Hermannus de monasterio 'Novi Operis' "propè Hallas Magdeburgensis Diœcesis eodem anno "missus ad Capitulum dictum Generale fui eidem "locutus."

In English the passage is as follows :—

"The Brother who compiled the book of *The* "*Imitation* is called or named Thomas, sub-prior in the "said monastery of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, in "the diocese of Utrecht and the province of Cologne, "and this said monastery is distant a league from "Windesheim, which is the head monastery, in which "the Canons Regular of the Province of Cologne, "Mayence, and Treves hold yearly a General Chapter. "The said compiler was still alive in 1454. And I, "Brother Hermann, of the monastery of the 'New "'Work' near Halle, in the diocese of Magdeburg, "being sent to the said General Chapter, spoke with "him." *

Under ordinary circumstances it would seem almost

* See Amort, Deductio Critica, pp. 98–100, who gives a notary's authentication of the extract; also Malou, p. 82; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., pp. 237–240; Becker, p. 33.

needless to add to the testimony of Busch and Ryd, whose evidence is given so clearly and pointedly; but, in the present case, such extraordinary and pertinacious ingenuity has been expended in endeavouring, by discrediting Thomas à Kempis, to support a phantom claim in favour of an imaginary individual, it becomes prudent to corroborate their authority.

John Mauburn.

The third witness is John Mauburn. A native of Brussels, he entered the monastery of Mount St. Agnes *shortly after the death of Thomas à Kempis.*

In 1491 he published at Basle a book entitled *Rosetum Spiritualium Exercitiorum*, in which he quotes *The Imitation* as the work of à Kempis. Again, in his *Scala Communionis* he does the same. Finally, in his *Venatorium*, he adds the words, "Qui Frater "Thomas à Kempis inter caetera opuscula, quae fecit, "composuit libellum, *Qui sequitur me*, quem falso "quidam Domino Gerson attribuunt." * A companion of Mauburn, who accompanied him into France, likewise quotes Thomas as the author of *The Imitation*.†

Wessel Gansford.

The fourth witness is Wessel Gansford. According to Albert Hardenberg, the disciple and biographer of Wessel, the latter acquired his first taste for true

* Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 115; Malou, p. 92; Santini, Seconda parte, p. 76; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., pp. 252–255; Becker, p. 44.

† Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 116; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 256; Becker, p. 45.

theology by reading *The Imitation of Christ, and actually went to Mount St. Agnes specially to make the acquaintance of its author, Thomas à Kempis.**

Thus far four contemporary witnesses have been quoted, of whom three knew Thomas personally (two of them being members of his own Order), and aver that he was the author of *The Imitation of Christ.* There is besides a host of others, either contemporary or nearly so, whose testimony is amply sufficient to establish the claims of the holy monk of Agnetenberg, even if we had not the irresistible evidence of Busch, Ryd, Mauburn, and Wessel Gansford. We shall proceed to quote a few more :—

The Anonymous Contemporary Biographer of Thomas à Kempis.

This author, the fifth witness, wrote his biography shortly after à Kempis' death, and states that his informants were the brethren of Mount St. Agnes, who had lived with Thomas à Kempis and had known him intimately. In the course of the life this writer distinctly quotes *The Imitation of Christ* as the work of à Kempis, and adds a catalogue of his various spiritual treatises, including therein the four books of *The Imitation.*†

* Malou, p. 88 ; Santini, 2nda parte, p. 72 ; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 257 ; Becker, p. 33.

† Mooren, Nachrichten, etc., p. 195 ; Malou, p. 84 ; Santini, 2nda parte, p. 66 ; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 246 ; Kettlewell's Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of Common Life, vol. i. p. 13 ; Becker, pp. 35–37.

Mathias Farinator.

The sixth witness is Mathias Farinator, a Carmelite monk of Augsburg, and contemporary of Thomas à Kempis, who transcribed *The Imitation* between 1472 and 1475, and states that à Kempis was its author.*

Adrian de But.

The seventh witness is Adrian de But, and his evidence comes with singular force in defence of the rights of Thomas à Kempis.

The Royal Commission of History of Belgium brought out in 1870, under the supervision of Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove, the *Chronicles of Adrian de But*, a monk of the famous Cistercian abbey of Dunes. These *Chronicles* date from 1431, and are continued up to the death of De But in 1488. Late in the *Chronicles*, and referring to the year 1459, the following note occurs:—"Hoc anno Frater Thomas à Kempis, de "Monte Sanctae Agnetis professor ordinis regularium "Canonicorum multos scriptis suis divulgatis aedificat: "Hic vitam sanctae Lidwigis descripsit et quoddam "volumen metrice super illud *Qui sequitur me.*" †

Here we find Adrian de But, the contemporary of Thomas à Kempis, attributing to him *The Imitation*

* Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 107; Malou, p. 89; Santini, 2nda parte, p. 73; Becker, p. 49.

† Careful examination of the manuscript itself, which I have lately made at the Burgundian Library at Brussels, with MM. Ruelens and Hosdey, has satisfied us that this note refers to 1459 (that is, twelve years before à Kempis' death), and not, as generally believed, to 1480.

of Christ, designating it, as usual, by its first sentence, "*Qui sequitur me*," and adding the word *metrice*. This latter term might have remained an inexplicable puzzle were it not for the discovery made about 1872 by Dr. Carl Hirsche, that *The Imitation of Christ*, as well as most of the other writings of Thomas à Kempis, is written and punctuated so as to be rhythmical! Herein, too, is found the explanation of the fact that certain old manuscripts of the book bear the title "Musica Ecclesiastica."* This point will be considered later on.

Peter Schott.

The eighth witness is Peter Schott. He was a Canon of Strasburg, a noted divine, poet, and literary critic. He wrote a laudatory preface to the works of Gerson, published in 1488, and distinctly states that the book, *On Contempt of this World*, a well-known synonym of *The Imitation*, was not the work of the great Chancellor, but of a certain Thomas, a Canon Regular.†

* Santini, 2ndª parte, p. 80; Becker, p. 50. The reader will do well to look over a masterly article on this controversy, entitled "A "New Light on an Old Subject," from the pen of Miss Agnes Lambert, in the *Dublin Review* of April, 1880. London: Burns and Oates. Also Hirsche's Prolegomena, vol. i.; and M. Ruelens' "Preface to "the facsimile of à Kempis' manuscript of the Imitation of Christ," published by Elliot Stock, London, 1877.

† Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 108; Malou, p. 91; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 242; Santini, 2ndª parte, p. 75; Becker, p. 50. See copy of Gerson's Works, in Library of Trinity College, Dublin, E. d. 28, 29.

Martin Simus.

The ninth witness is Martin Simus, of Strasburg, who, in his edition of the works of Gerson (1494), again distinctly states that the book, *On the Contempt of the World*, was not the work of that author, but of a certain Thomas, Canon Regular.*

Jehan Lambert.

The tenth witness is Jehan Lambert. He translated *The Imitation* into French in 1493, and asserts that it is the work neither of St. Bernard, nor of John Gerson, but of Thomas à Kempis.†

Trithemius.

The eleventh witness is Trithemius, better known as John Trittenheim, Benedictine Abbot of Spanheim, one of the most learned ecclesiastical historians of his time. He wrote in 1494 and 1495, and attributes *The Imitation of Christ* to à Kempis, the author of the *Sermons to Novices.* He seems confused between John and Thomas à Kempis, as he was in the case of Busch, whom he calls Arnold instead of John. Nevertheless, his evidence is *most important*, as showing that in his time *The Imitation* was *not* attributed to a Benedictine author, but to a member of the Congregation of Windesheim.‡

* Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 108.

† Ibid., p. 109; Malou, p. 95; Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 244; Becker, p. 51.

‡ Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 113–115; Becker, pp. 52–55.

Peter Danhausser.

The twelfth witness is Peter Danhausser. I have in my possession a copy of the works of Thomas à Kempis, edited by the above, and printed in Nuremberg by Hochfeder, in 1494. At the head of the first chapter of *The Imitation* we find a distinct declaration that its author *was* Thomas à Kempis, and *not* the Chancellor Gerson. A preface to this edition by the Carthusian, George Pirckamer, adds the weight of his authority to the text. Immediately following *The Imitation* we find the *Meditatio Cordis*, with Gerson's name, given in this edition, as it were to observe the old custom of putting these two works side by side.

Jodocus Badius Ascensius.

The thirteenth witness is Jodocus Badius Ascensius, a man of great learning, who edited and published the works of Thomas à Kempis in the year 1521, including therein *The Imitation of Christ*; adding in his preface that he undertook the work at the request of the Benedictines of St. Germain-des-Prés, the Carthusians of Paris, and the Celestinians of Soissons. Evidently all these held that Thomas was the author.*

If space permitted, I might go on adding witnesses to the number of twenty or more,† but this seems utterly needless. Any one who could resist the

* Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 110; Malou, p. 97; Becker, p. 55.

† See the works of Amort, Malou, Kettlewell, Santini, and Becker, on this subject.

evidence of those already quoted is not likely to be influenced if they were multiplied by thousands. It seems impossible to me that any one can read the foregoing testimony—coming from witnesses either contemporary or nearly so, who, acting independently and above all suspicion, unite in attributing the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* to Thomas à Kempis—without arriving at the conclusion that he, and he alone, must have been the writer. All other information appears superfluous; although, on account of the extraordinary tactics adopted by his adversaries, it may be well to strengthen his defence. I shall, therefore, make a few remarks upon the external evidence deducible from an examination of the various manuscripts of *The Imitation of Christ* which have been discovered from time to time.

II.—*External Evidence of Manuscripts.*

This branch of the controversy covers so wide a field that it would be impossible to treat it fully in the present essay, and I must confine myself to little more than a statement of the conclusions to which it inevitably leads. I shall commence with a few observations touching the *age* of the manuscripts. This is a matter of necessity, in order to demolish certain baseless fabrics erected by à Kempis' adversaries with the design of invalidating his claims.

In the first place, I may state, with what I am satisfied is incontrovertible certainty, that *no manu-*

script of The Imitation of Christ has ever been produced of an age antecedent to the mature manhood of Thomas à Kempis—that is to say, the first third of the fifteenth century. We may find many efforts made to discredit this statement, but not one is in the slightest degree worthy of credence.

The various manuscripts, numbering over two hundred, may be classified into those which are dated and those without date. The earliest dated manuscript of *even a portion* (Book I.) of *The Imitation* is that from the Benedictine monastery of Moelck, which is supposed to be signed 1421.* The complete copies of *The Imitation* vary in date from 1427 downwards.

Let it be remembered that at this period Thomas à Kempis was nearly fifty years of age.

There exists one manuscript bearing the dates 1384 and 1385, to which I must allude at some length, for the purpose of showing that it is not worthy of the smallest confidence.

The codex in question is named the "Paulanus;" it comes originally from the Benedictine monastery of

* It is very doubtful whether this date is trustworthy. It is not appended to the portion of The Imitation contained in the manuscript, but to another out of several treatises in the same volume. Obviously the time at which these various works were bound together is uncertain, and so is the date of the portion of The Imitation contained therein. See Gence's edition of The Imitation, Preface, pp. xiii., xiv.; De Grégory's Histoire, etc., vol. i. p. 180; Santini, 2nda parte, pp. 257, 258. I may mention that an interesting account of a visit to the monastery of Moelck, by Dr. St. George Mivart, will be found in the *Nineteenth Century*, September, 1886.

Wiblingen, and now belongs to that of St. Paul, in Carinthia. Oddly enough, it has only recently been brought to light. Dom Wolfsgruber, in his work on John Gersen, gives a description of the manuscript and a facsimile of the two last pages.* He writes with praiseworthy caution, and candidly avows that there are many difficulties connected with it. He also puts forward a theoretical defence, which seems to me wholly unsustained. Before making further comment on the Paulanus manuscript, I shall give a translation of Wolfsgruber's account of it :—

"Benedictine Monastery of St. Paul, in Carinthia.

"Cod. Chart. xiv., fol. 257, 12°, contains only the "four books of *The Imitation of Christ.* Fol. 1ª: "'Incipiunt capitula sequentis libri Primum De ymita- "'cione christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.' "Then follow the headings of the twenty-five chapters "of the first book, which fill fol. 1ª and 1ᵇ, and on the "first page have a red line drawn underneath. Fol. 2ª: "'Incipiunt ammoniciones ad spiritualem uitam ualde "'utiles et notabiles. Et primo de ymitacione christi et "'contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi. Cap. pr. Qui "'sequitur me.' Expl. fol. 58ª: 'Uim intuleris. Tu "'autem domine mei miserere. Amen. In die "'Apostoli Andree, 1384.' Fol. 58ᵇ: 'Incipiunt "'ammoniciones ad interna trahentes.' After the

* Page 235, and plate v. The codex can be seen at St. Paul's Benedictine Monastery, which is situated in Styria, not more than a day's journey from Marburg.

"specification of the chapter headings there follows "immediately, without any separation, 'Regnum dei intra "'uos est.' Expl. fol. 86[b]: 'Regnum celorum. Incipit "'tercia pars huius libri, que est de interna consolacione. "'Capitula. 1384.' Fol. 87[a] gives these chapter "headings. Fol. 90[a], without any separation: 'Audiam "'quid loquatur.' Expl. fol. 211[b]: perpetue clari- "tatis. Amen. 1384. Ibid: Sequitur nunc quarta "pars huius libri de sacramento eucharistie. Again "there are chapter headings to fol. 212[b], where there "is a red line drawn underneath, and book iv. begins, "which concludes on fol. 257[a]: 'Inscrutabila dicenda.* "'Amen. 1385. Die festo Pasche per N[icolaum] "'V[ogt]. Urbano papa.' Fol. 257[b] repeats: 1385. "Urbano papa; then, Scriptor mente pia petit unum "Ave Maria. Si nomen quaeris Nicolaum recte "tenebis, si Vogt addatur, qui scripsit ipse uocatur. "F. Uolrich M°cccc°xiii°, is indicated to be the author "and writer of this page. This Brother Uolrich is "probably the Habluzel, who, on two inserted pages "at the beginning of the manuscript, gives a kind of "diary and the form of profession (*Professformel*) of "Uolrich Habluzel, who was till 1432 the Director "of the monastery. The Nicholas Vogt mentioned "is, according to the opinion of Martin Mack of "Wiblingen (Dubia . . . , page 26), that Prior Nicholas "of Wiblingen, who, according to the old necrologies "of this monastery, died between 1380 and 1404. "The Pope Urban introduced at the end of the

* I read this as "inscrutabilia" in the facsimile.—[F. R. C.]

"fourth book can only be Urban VI., who reigned "1378–1389, and only two hundred years afterwards "had a successor of the same name. Also the feasts "of Easter and of St. Urban coincided in 1385. Thus "all things concur to show the codex was written in "1384 and 1385, four and five years respectively after "the birth of Thomas à Kempis. Although all this "agrees, and even Martin Mack of Wiblingen, in his "above-mentioned work in manuscript, communicates "the deed of a sworn imperial notary which certifies "the chronological memoranda of this manuscript "to be genuine, yet the affair offers many difficulties. "The writing is in style and in its abbreviations "belonging to the fifteenth century, and the date of "the manuscript, pages 58 and 211, suffers from "erasures and after-touches, whilst indeed that on "pages 86[a] and 257[a] appears to be genuine. The "first manuscript experts of the present day have "given the explanation :—The writer of this codex "has at the same time transcribed the dates and the "notes of his original, thus the contrast between date "and writing is accounted for. It is also interesting "to know how the manuscript came from Wiblingen "to St. Paul, in Carinthia. This is communicated to "us by George Zeigler on the inside of the back "binding cover and on the obverse of the fly-leaf. "Driven from home, he and his companions offered "'Gratitudinis etpietatis ergo hocce bibliothecae suae "'. . . palladium ueluti e Trojae ignibus ereptum' to "St. Paul. Subscribed are, besides George Zeigler,

"Roman Zängerle, Bernard Gantser, on the Kalends "of June, 1817."

Having considered the foregoing statement attentively, let us see whether we should accept the Paulanus manuscript as genuine, or reject it as spurious. We shall study it under the following heads :—

First. The historical data furnished to us.

Secondly. The theory suggested in its defence.

Thirdly. The dates, altered and unaltered.

Fourthly. The note at page 257[a].

First. The historical data appear quite worthless.

(*a*) We are told that F. Uolrich is *probably* the Habluzel, etc.

(*b*) We are told that the N[icholas] V[ogt] mentioned is, *according to the opinion* of Martin Mack of Wiblingen, that Prior Nicholas of Wiblingen who, according to the old necrologies of that monastery, died between 1380 and 1404. Surely a *probability* and an *opinion* are not sufficient in a matter of such importance. The words of Martin Mack are not given, nor those of the old necrology of Wiblingen, neither are we told where these data can be verified.

(*c*) Moreover, if this codex was esteemed as a "palladium" snatched from the fire, and brought in triumph to St. Paul's in 1817, how comes it that we have not heard of it until within the last few years. Is it conceivable that such a document, if trustworthy, should have been allowed to lie neglected so long ?

Secondly. The theoretical defence of the manuscript is certainly very far-fetched—viz., that the writer of this fifteenth-century codex, as its style, abbreviations, etc., prove, has at the same time transcribed the dates and notes of his original. We have no recorded evidence, either in the manuscript or elsewhere, that it is a copy from a fourteenth-century original. This theory is pure hypothesis, ingenious enough, but utterly inadmissible. We are not even given the names of the experts to whom it is attributed.

Thirdly. Respecting the dates, both those which are admittedly subjected to erasures and retouching, and those which *appear* to be genuine.

The erasures and alterations of two dates open up grave doubts and misgivings. If the dates subjected to this treatment corresponded with those which appear to be genuine, why were they altered? If they did not correspond, the question arises, which were the genuine dates? It is impossible to resist the suspicion that some one manipulated this fifteenth-century manuscript, wrote in the dates which appear to be genuine, and altered the others to correspond.

Fourthly. Respecting the note which mentions Pope Urban. Let us examine the facsimile which Wolfsgruber gives of the two last pages of the codex (plate v.), and see what it teaches.

(*a*) The length of the two pages does not correspond. The last, containing the note, being about an inch

longer than its fellow. This is unusual and remarkable. In all the genuine old manuscripts which I have examined the copyists appear to have observed uniformity very carefully.

(*b*) Still more important are the facts which a careful examination of the note reveals. It seems evident that its handwriting is different from that of the page above it. The original page, in size and writing, appears to end with the word "Amen." The date (1385) heading the note is crowded up, so that the "Amen" divides the figures; and the formation of the letters, although an imitation, is not so perfect, and the slope is markedly different. To save the reader's time, let me point out as specimens of striking dissimilarity the formation and slope of the letters *e*, *f*, and *t* in the words *die festo* of the note when contrasted with the same letters in the pages of the manuscript.

All this, I need not say, leads up to the question, Is the note part of the original manuscript? I am clearly of opinion that it is not. The lower portion of both pages is blotted and soiled, but even so, assuming that Wolfsgruber's facsimile is faithful, the discrepancies noted are easily recognized.

So much for the Paulanus Codex. I am not aware that any one relies upon it, and it is clear from Wolfsgruber's text that he does not put it forward with any confidence. The foregoing investigation leads me to the conviction that it is a fifteenth-century manuscript, which some one has manipulated, altering some dates, inserting others, and adding the note alluding to Pope

Urban (evidently Urban VI., who reigned between 1378 and 1389) in order to corroborate the dates.

*In fine, it seems quite impossible to accept the document as evidence.**

Respecting the undated manuscripts it will be necessary to consider their value in the controversy with some care. À Kempis' adversaries make vigorous efforts to turn their uncertain ages into weapons against him, with what result we shall soon see. I need not, in these days of more perfect information and knowledge, allude to the wild statements of enthusiasts like Dom Cajetan and De Grégory, who were foolhardy enough to attribute the Arona and Avogadro manuscripts to the thirteenth century. No one hears of such eccentricity now without a smile; but there are still to be found theorists—like Wolfsgruber, Puyol, Loth, and others—who would argue that some of the undated manuscripts of *The Imitation* may belong to the end of the fourteenth or first years of the fifteenth centuries; in other words, to a period when Thomas à Kempis was too young to have been the author. This theory must be first discounted and then weighed against the positive facts which point to him as the author.

The consideration of the undated manuscripts of *The Imitation* brings us at once to the subject of paleography, the science of determining, so far as may be possible, the age of an undated manuscript, from its style, abbreviations, etc. Obviously if one single

* See Becker, pp. 198–200.

manuscript of *The Imitation* could be definitely proved to have been written at the end of the fourteenth, or the very commencement of the fifteenth century, the claims of Thomas à Kempis should be abandoned at once and for ever; *but this is exactly what has never been done, despite all efforts.* For centuries his adversaries have searched the libraries of Europe, but their long-wished-for manuscript *has not been found.* I make this assertion with absolute confidence.

We must here pause and consider what paleography can do and within what limits. If we push the capabilities of this science to the uttermost extremity, we find that the most skilled experts cannot fix the age of an undated manuscript closer than within fifty years; that is to say, a margin of that extent must be conceded to cover the uncertainty. Suppose the date named is 1400, the actual date may be twenty-five years earlier or later. Nay, more, a margin of fifty years is in reality a very narrow one and far too rigid for ordinary purposes. The most skilled paleographists often err much more, as many instances prove. Becker quotes one in which a very experienced judge made a mistake of no less than one hundred and forty years!* One source of error in paleography which seems to have escaped notice, lies in the age of the individual writer. If he happens to be an old man, say seventy years of age, he naturally writes as he learned fifty years before, and thus his manuscript appears far older than it really is. In his

* Becker, p. 198.

case, a not uncommon one, the margin of fifty years should be expanded to fully sixty years or more. Applying all this to the codices asserted by anti-Kempists to date back to the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century, it is quite obvious that they may in reality have been written in 1430 or later. Thus, the conclusion to which we are driven by the strictest interpretation of the value of paleographic science is, that there is not the slightest proof that any one of the manuscripts of *The Imitation*, attributed to a date when à Kempis was too young to have been the author, was actually written earlier than the time when he was from forty to fifty years of age. Accordingly, their evidence against à Kempis *is utterly valueless.*

It is a very significant fact that the Père Denifle, who, as subarchivist of the Vatican Library, must have exceptional knowledge of dated Italian manuscripts of all ages, and therefore be an excellent judge of those which are not dated, asserts positively that every single one of the manuscripts of *The Imitation* put forward by the Gersenists belongs to the fifteenth century, and not the earliest portion of it.* Let this be clearly understood and remembered, anent the arguments of those who contend for an imaginary author of the thirteenth century, that, while the libraries of Europe are filled with manuscripts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, not a solitary codex of *The Imitation of Christ* has been examined by this highly skilled expert, the Père Denifle, which he does not

* Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, p. 3.

declare to belong to the fifteenth century, and not the commencement of it!

In conclusion, *it may be confidently repeated that not a single manuscript of "The Imitation," dated or undated, can be shown to be antecedent to Thomas à Kempis' middle age.*

To continue, we have already seen that *The Imitation* appeared anonymously. This was the custom with the School of Windesheim.* Were it not for Busch we should never have heard that the *Epistle on the Life and Passion of our Lord* (which he translated into Latin, and which we find at the end of the first book of the *Chronicle of Windesheim*), with its numerous foreshadowings of *The Imitation*, was actually the handbook of the Congregation of Windesheim, and earnestly recommended to its members by the Prior, Vos van Huesden.† Were it not for Thomas à Kempis, what should we know of the saintly maxims of Groot, Radewyn, Lubert Berner, and John Ketel?

In like manner it would have defied all precedent if *The Imitation*, at the time of its first appearance, had been put forward as the composition of à Kempis. It is true, Busch, Ryd, and others, declared its paternity in their writings,‡ and, probably, much earlier in their conversation, but not, so far as we can ascertain, until the book had been circulated far and near, and its origin, doubtless, very generally surmised. From

* Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, p. 97 and following.

† Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. xi., p. 300.

‡ See Contemporary Witnesses already quoted.

thenceforth we find that a preponderance of the manuscripts which give a name attribute it to à Kempis, either by original or very early inscriptions, not unfrequently guarding his incognito by designating him as "a certain Canon Regular," etc.

All this harmonizes perfectly with the circumstances under which the book appeared; and the absence of very early manuscripts directly naming à Kempis as the author, becomes not only intelligible, but the conviction grows that anything else would have been against all probability.

An exhaustive investigation of all the manuscripts extant would fill a volume, and is therefore impossible at present; but the works of Gence, De Grégory, Malou, Santini, Spitzen, and Becker, enter into minute details, and satisfy me that the existing evidence of these manuscripts points to Holland and the Chapter of Windesheim as the birthplace of *The Imitation*, and to Thomas à Kempis as its generally accredited compiler.

Before concluding these brief observations on the relations of the manuscripts to à Kempis, I must allude to his autograph manuscript of 1441, which affords indirect evidence of vital importance. This codex, which I have examined carefully, may be seen in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, Nos. 5855–5861. It contains thirteen spiritual treatises bound together in a single volume. At the commencement we find the four books of *The Imitation of Christ*, and, following them, nine other treatises. I give the list of contents, which is in à Kempis' handwriting:

"In hoc volumine hi libelli continentur.
Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris.
Regnum Dei intra vos est dicit Dominus.
De Sacramento. Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis.
Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.
De disciplina claustralium. Apprehendite disciplinam.
Epistola devota ad quemdam regularem.
Renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestre.
Cognovi Domine quia equitas judicia tua.
Recommendatio humilitatis. Discite a me.
De mortificata vita. Gloriosus apostolus Paulus.
De bona pacifica vita. Si vis Deo dignus.
De elevatione mentis. Vacate et videte cum ceteris.
Brevis ammonicio. Ab exterioribus."

At the end of the volume we find the following signature :—"Finitus et completus anno Domini "MCCCCXLI., per manus fratris Thome Kempis in "Monte Sancte Agnetis prope Zwollis."

Let us now see how this manuscript bears witness in favour of à Kempis. The four first treatises in the above list are the four books of *The Imitation* (the fourth book, as we name it, being placed third, and the third last). Following them we find nine other spiritual essays. We have not the smallest reason to doubt that these latter were composed by Thomas à Kempis. They have come down to us as his works, undisputed until the partisans of the mythical Gersen found it expedient to cast a baseless doubt upon their authenticity, and each and every one of them (as well as the four books of *The Imitation*) is specifically named in the catalogue of his writings given by his contemporary biographer. From hence it follows that any one who denies that *The Imitation* was

written by our author must be prepared to assume that he, a man of extraordinary sanctity, humility, and truth, placed at the head of a collection of his own works a treatise to which he had no claim! Such an hypothesis is not alone incredible, but actually defiant of common sense. Viewed in this light, à Kempis' autograph of 1441 appears an undeniable proof in his favour.

À Kempis' adversaries endeavour to raise a contention against him, founded on the signature of this autograph of 1441—viz., "Finitus et completus," etc. They say that if Thomas was the author, he would have stated so, and not signed as copyists generally did. In arguing thus they forget, first, that the transcription of a document does not exclude authorship, especially in the case of a noted copyist like Thomas; and, secondly, that it was not the habit of the members of the Congregation of Windesheim to claim the paternity of their works.

In confirmation of all this, we find an analogous signature to à Kempis' autograph of 1456, which contains his *Conciones et Meditationes*—works which we likewise have no reason to doubt as authentic, and which we also find enumerated in the catalogue of the contemporary biographer.*

There are many striking internal evidences in the manuscript of 1441, which point to à Kempis as the author. The corrections and alterations, not alone of

* This manuscript is to be seen in the Burgundian Library, Brussels, Nos. 4585–4587.

words, but even of expression; the vacant spaces left in some places, as though to be filled up later—all lead to the belief that the copyist was also the author.* The Pastoor Spitzen devotes a chapter to the consideration of this subject, and puts forward very solid reasons for his opinion that this manuscript of *The Imitation* is the original.† The date 1441 is placed at the end of the nine treatises which complete the volume, and, doubtless, refers only to the period at which the last of them was finished, or the whole collection bound together. I strongly recommend the reader to study carefully this remarkable portion of Spitzen's *Nouvelle Défense.*

In conclusion, I would remark that the evidence of the manuscripts, despite à Kempis' incognito, bears strongly in his favour; and this is most significant, when we remember all the circumstances of the case—his obscurity, the anonymous appearance of the book, the ignorance of the world at large as to its origin, and the spirit of indifference of the Windesheimers as to any claim for its paternity. Let it be borne in mind, too, that as à Kempis is the *only* candidate for whom a single contemporary witness can be cited, so also he is the *sole* one in whose favour any manuscript can be produced which was written either during that candidate's lifetime or shortly after his death.

* Becker, pp. 232, 233.

† Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, pp. 135 and following.

III.—*Internal Evidence.*

When we come to examine *The Imitation* closely, we find so many internal evidences which point to Thomas à Kempis as the author, that the main difficulty lies in knowing where to commence their description.

In the first place, as regards the style in which the book is written. It is needless to observe, to those who are familiar with Thomas' works, that *The Imitation* constitutes about *one-tenth* of the whole. Between it and the rest there is so remarkable a similarity of thought, language, and idiom, that it seems impossible to doubt that all are the product of one mind and the work of one hand. This point has been developed by many early writers upon the subject, such as Rosweyd, Carr, Heser, and Amort; and later authorities, especially Malou, Hirsche, Spitzen, and Becker, have taken great pains to clear it up, and with remarkable success. The works of the four last-named authors are easily accessible to all.

To instance the similarity of thought and choice of subjects, Malou gives a list of the parallelisms existing between *The Imitation of Christ* and the other works of à Kempis, such as the *Sermons to the Novices*, *The Soliloquy of the Soul*, *The Garden of Roses*, and *Valley of Lilies*.* These are but selections from the many which might be offered. The opponents of à Kempis will argue that this merely proves his familiarity with *The Imitation;* but such a plea cannot

* Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 141–144.

stand. If he quoted *The Imitation* verbatim, it might be said that he copied from it, but was not its author. This he never does. He only develops in his other works the ideas contained in *The Imitation*, but in no instance refers to it. The inference is obvious. Some of à Kempis' adversaries lay stress upon the *supposed* inferiority of his other writings as compared with *The Imitation*. This argument is partly baseless and wholly inapplicable. It would appear that many who rely on it have not studied his compositions attentively. To those who have done so, the conclusion is totally different. Rosweyd, one of the most erudite scholars of his time, profoundly versed in this subject, gives us his opinion in what I hold to be an aphorism. He says, "As a rose has the perfume of a rose, so also "*The Imitation of Christ* is like to the other writings "of Thomas à Kempis."* Alban Butler, the author of *The Lives of the Saints*, unquestionably a very competent judge, denies the asserted inequality of many of the acknowledged works of à Kempis as contrasted with *The Imitation*, and specially instances *The Three Tabernacles* and the treatise *On True Compunction*.† To these I might add very many other productions of the holy Canon of Agnetenberg.‡ Coustou, a skilled expert on this point, whom I shall quote later on, is of the same opinion. So also is Milman.§ Last, but

* Vindiciae Kempenses, chap. xi.

† See the works of Charles Butler, Esq., vol. iii., pp. 472, 473. London: Clarke and Sons, 1817.

‡ See Note at end of Appendix.

§ Latin Christianity, vol. ix., p. 161, note.

certainly not least, I shall mention Dr. Carl Hirsche, one of the most learned critics of modern days. This author, the discoverer of the peculiar punctuation adopted by Thomas both in *The Imitation* and in his other works, after an exhaustive investigation of them all, has arrived at the definite conclusion that he, and he alone, could have been the author of the great book.*

Taking this argument at its fullest value, and admitting that some of à Kempis' works do not equal *The Imitation*, I would ask the question,—Are all authors even in their various compositions? Beyond question we must admit they are not. Few would compare St. Augustine's *City of God*, St. Thomas of Aquin's *Summa Theologica*, or St. Francis de Sales' *Introduction to a Devout Life*, with their other works; or, to come to an example in our own language, no one familiar with the works of John Bunyan would attempt to contrast *The Pilgrim's Progress* with the rest of his productions. In like manner we admit the obvious fact that à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* is his masterpiece, embodying not alone his own ascetical knowledge but also the accumulated wisdom of the "Circle of Windesheim," from which it will be seen he borrowed largely.

While *The Imitation* comprises all the spirituality of the school which Thomas represented, his other works were written, doubtless often comparatively hastily, for different audiences, and more as dissertations on the principles inculcated in his great *chef d'oeuvre*.

* Prolegomena, etc., Zweiter Band, pp. 538–544.

Even so, many of them, I assert confidently, are quite worthy of the author of *The Imitation of Christ*.

About twenty-five years ago an ingenious and learned critic, M. Philippe Tamizey de Larroque, wrote some articles with the intention of showing that the internal evidence of style, etc., in *The Imitation* and in the admitted works of Thomas à Kempis, tends to disprove the claims of the pious Canon Regular of Mount St. Agnes.*

I have not found in these clever essays anything to satisfy me that their author is justified in his conclusions, and, on the other hand, I have observed some errors which appear unaccountable. I shall say nothing of his style, except that, despite its attractions, it is strikingly deficient in judicial calm. M. de Larroque argues against à Kempis on the ground that his acknowledged works contain certain words and expressions not found in *The Imitation*, and *vice versâ*. Furthermore, that he treats some subjects rather (but not substantially) differently from the author of *The Imitation*. The discrepancies insisted upon by M. de Larroque appear to me trifling, and altogether insufficient to support his contention, unless, indeed, we were to grant what is not alone against probability and experience, but even impossible—namely, that a given voluminous author like à Kempis, who beyond

* Preuves que Thomas à Kempis n'a pas composé l'Imitation de N. S. Jésus-Christ, par Philippe Tamizey de Larroque. Extrait des Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne, tom. iii. et iv., 1861. Paris: A. Durand, 1862.

doubt was in addition a diligent compiler, must of necessity repeat himself in thought, word, and expression in all his works, and maintain the same level of merit, irrespective of the subject in hand and the audience to which he addresses himself.

M. de Larroque falls into some strange errors, of which I shall single out one for illustration. At page 27 he reminds us that à Kempis loved rhyming, and that the author of *The Imitation* did not, and therefore that Thomas could not have been the author. This is a fundamental mistake, very curious for a diligent reader, but excusable to some extent, because M. de Larroque wrote in 1861, and Dr. Hirsche did not publish his researches on the rhythm and rhyme of *The Imitation* until 1873. As a matter of fact, the rhythm and rhyme of *The Imitation*, so identical with what we find in à Kempis' other works, constitutes a most important proof that Thomas *was* the author. I shall not anticipate here what I have to say upon this point further on.

M. de Larroque concludes his clever brochure by some curious speculations as to the personality of the real author. He rejects à Kempis,—likewise Gersen, with emphasis, and is altogether doubtful about Gerson. But he hazards as far-fetched a solution of the problem as I have yet encountered. He tells us that the love of the French for the book points to France as the country of its origin: "la prédilection d'une "mère pour son enfant"! Had our author investigated the internal evidence derived from the study of the

linguistic peculiarities of *The Imitation*—a point which he declines to enter upon (page 77)—I believe he would never have arrived at this conclusion. A little later I touch this philological aspect of the question.

I would hope that when M. de Larroque masters the whole evidence now before us, to a vast deal of which he does not even allude, and some of which has come to light since he wrote, he may arrive at a very different opinion respecting the claims of the saintly Canon of Mount St. Agnes.

Next, we shall allude to the peculiarities of diction which we find, both in *The Imitation of Christ* and in à Kempis' other works. Wonderfully touching and epigrammatic as its language undoubtedly is, no one would venture to hold up *The Imitation* as a model of classical Latinity. On the contrary, it is so manifestly uncouth that attempts have been made, very unsuccessfully, to amend the text. Sebastian Castellio's paraphrase is the most widely known of these efforts.* The peculiarities of the original depend greatly on certain unusual elements, including a number of barbarisms, Italianized words, words used in a peculiar sense, and abundant Dutch idioms.

My object in dwelling upon these topics is to impress upon my reader the facts: First, that we find certain very marked singularities in the language of *The Imitation*; secondly, that these same traits appear in all the other works of à Kempis; and finally, that from thence we are led to infer that he was the author.

* My copy dates from Cambridge: J. Hayes, 1685.

One characteristic of the language of *The Imitation* is the presence of barbarisms. For example, the word *alta* is used to signify *sublime*, *tenere* in place of *aestimare*, *redient* for *redibunt*, *totum* for *omne*, and so on interminably. Now, we find the same rare terms, used in the same sense, throughout à Kempis' other works.* To argue that this parallelism is the result of accident is to adopt an utterly untenable position.

Again, the author of *The Imitation* frequently uses Italianized words, such as *regratiari*, *pensare*, *querulando*, *sentimenta*, *bassare*, etc. An attempt has been made to utilize this fact as an argument that the author was an Italian; but if this be true, Thomas à Kempis must have been an Italian, because we find his writings filled with these words!

I have already alluded to the frequent occurrence of the word "devotus" in *The Imitation* and in à Kempis' other works. Despite all cavil, the peculiar sense in which this word is constantly used in designating the members of "The Modern Devotion" is very characteristic, and significant of the common authorship of all the works in question.†

I have stated that the language of *The Imitation* partakes largely of a Dutch character, both in conception and idiom. It is needless to observe how important a corroboration this offers in favour of

* See Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 146, 147; also Amort, Deductio Critica, pp. 161–251, where we find about four hundred parallelisms of idiom tabulated.

† Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 120–128.

Thomas. A German by birth, while still a boy he came to Holland, where he remained for the rest of his life. Naturally he came to speak, think, and write as a Dutchman. This peculiarity of the Latinity of *The Imitation*, while it bears witness in favour of à Kempis, especially when coupled with other evidence, is sufficient to annihilate the claims of Gerson, or of the supposed Italian Benedictine author. An erudite Frenchman like Gerson could not have written Latin full of Dutch idioms, not one of which is to be found throughout his voluminous writings, and such a feat would have been equally impossible for an Italian. This philological aspect of the subject is one which could not be satisfactorily treated in the present sketch, but I shall give a few illustrations, and abundant references to accessible works, in which any one willing to undertake a very elaborate study will find all he can desire.

The only language into which *The Imitation* can be translated literally is the Dutch. Let us take a few examples of the Flemish idioms which pervade the book from cover to cover. If a Dutchman wishes to say that he knows a book *by heart*, he says, "van "buiten," that is, *outside*. Now, we find the author of *The Imitation* turns this phrase into Latin—barbarous no doubt, but a literal translation—as follows: "Si "scires totam Bibliam *exterius*." This expression is untranslatable into French or Italian;—it must be rendered by a paraphrase. Again, to express *indifference* in good Dutch one says, to see a thing

with an *even countenance*, "Met een gelijk aengezicht." The author of *The Imitation* translates this phrase literally: "Ita ut *una aequali facie* in gratiarum actione "maneas." This expression, like the foregoing, cannot be translated into French or Italian except by a paraphrase.

The same idea of not caring about a thing is expressed in Dutch as *not falling upon it*—"Ik val "daer niet op." Now, we find the author of *The Imitation* adopts this precise phrase in the following barbarous Latin:—"Verus amator Christi *non cadit* "*super* consolationes." Here, again, his words are untranslatable into French or Italian.

If space permitted, we might fill a volume with similar illustrations of the Teutonic idioms which pervade *The Imitation of Christ*, but I think it better to offer the above, which are taken from Malou, and to refer to a list of works in which the subject is treated exhaustively.* A little careful study of them will satisfy any one that the author of the great book *thought* in Dutch.

In opposition to this philological argument, which bears equally strongly in favour of à Kempis and against Gersen, Signor Veratti enters the lists to show

* Scutum Kempense, Authore Eusebio Amort, etc., etc., p. 19, etc.; Coloniae Agrippinae: H. Rommerskirchen, 1728. Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 129, 140; Becker, pp. 74–100. Spitzen, Les Hollandismes de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, etc. Encore les Néerlandismes du livre de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ; Lettre de Monseigneur Lootens au Rév. A. Delvigne. Bruxelles: Vromant, 1885. Letter signed "L. L.," in *Tablet*, September 22, 1883.

that some Italian idioms are also to be found in *The Imitation.* This is exactly what we might naturally expect. It is never difficult to find phrases approaching to Italian in any Latin book. The close relationship between the two languages prepares us for this, and undoubtedly a faint Italian element shows itself in all à Kempis' writings. Nevertheless the learned Signor does not essay to account for the prevalent Flemish idioms; and very naturally so, because the only explanation possible is that the language of the author must have been Dutch. Malou discusses Veratti's contention with great care, and completely disproves it.*

When quoting Adrian de But as one of the contemporary witnesses in favour of à Kempis, I alluded to the system of punctuation and rhythm adopted in *The Imitation*, which explains the use of the words *metrice* and *Musica Ecclesiastica* applied to it. We shall now consider this point at somewhat greater length, and see how strongly it favours the belief that Thomas was the author. In the year 1879, Elliot Stock, of London, brought out a facsimile edition of *The Imitation*, taken by photography from à Kempis' manuscript of 1441, to which is prefixed an introduction by M. Charles Ruelens, Curator of the Department of Manuscripts in the Royal Library, Brussels. This accomplished paleographist describes this recently discovered punctuation so lucidly that I think I cannot do better than reproduce his words :—

* Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 150–172.

"A critic of great learning and of rare penetration, "Dr. Carl Hirsche, of Hamburg, happened some time "ago to be engaged in studying the text, for the pur- "pose of publishing a new and critical edition. While "minutely collating the manuscript, he was struck by "certain paleographical peculiarities. He discovered "signs of the division of chapters, and a perfectly "original system of punctuation, the existence of "which he afterwards recognized in all the undoubted "works of Thomas, whether transcribed by himself or "by others, although in none was its application so "complete as in those written by his own hand. "These marks of punctuation are as follows:—The "full stop followed by a small capital; the full stop "followed by a large capital; the colon followed by a "small letter; the usual sign of interrogation; and, "lastly, an unusual sign; the *clivis*, or *flexa*, used in the "musical notation of the period, ⸗. All these are "used in a systematic manner, and Dr. Hirsche soon "discovered the rules according to which they are "employed.

"He also observed other peculiarities, of which "some few authors appear to have had a faint per- "ception: the rhythmical periods, the cadenced sen- "tences, and the numerous rhymes which run through "the treatise, and which cannot be ascribed to chance. "He also discovered that Thomas made use of the "signs of punctuation not only to mark the limits of "the sense of his propositions, but also to indicate "their rhythm. They serve in his writings the same

"purpose as do in music the signs which indicate the "modulations of the voice; they mark the pauses "which the reader must observe in order that he may "recite the sentence in accordance with the intention "of the author, and give it that effect, that cadence, "that charm which speech requires to make it penetrate "into the hearer's soul.

"The mystical authors belonging to the school of "Johannes Ruysbroeck and Gerard Groot often adopted "the same means to charm the ears of those to whom "they addressed their lessons; but none among them "made use of those signs in so characteristic a manner "as did Thomas à Kempis. With him it was a complete "and studied system, which he applied most carefully "to the transcription of all his religious writings.

* * * * * *

"If we listen to a Netherlander reading a passage "from *The Imitation*, pronouncing the Latin according "to the usage of his country, and following the rhythm "marked by the accentuation, we recognize at once "the existence of a decided melody, sought after by "the author, and full of charm."

It is right to observe that this element of rhythm and rhyme, indicated by the punctuation so systematically adopted by à Kempis both in *The Imitation* and in his other works, although strongly corroborative of his common authorship, cannot be looked upon as a conclusive proof, but rather as one out of many indications. It is well known that in ancient times, earlier than those of the Windesheimers, when books were

scarce and difficult to procure, spiritual writers availed themselves of the aid of musical cadence to fix their teachings on the memory of their hearers, and for this end adopted a somewhat similar method of punctuation. For these reasons we must accept the arguments of Hirsche and Ruelens with a certain amount of reservation.

For a complete exposition of this newly discovered punctuation, met with in the works of à Kempis, I would refer the reader to Dr. Hirsche's *Prolegomena* (Band i., ii.) and to the preface to his *Critical Edition of the Imitation of Christ.** Becker (at page 192) gives an excellent illustration of its application to one of the *Sermons to the Novices.*

To conclude the internal evidence, we shall now glance at a very striking and potent argument in favour of the general belief that Thomas à Kempis was the author of *The Imitation of Christ.* It is well known that he was the most prolific and representative writer of the "Circle of Windesheim," and therefore, assuming that he was the author, we would naturally expect to discover in the book traces of the teaching of that school. Now, this is precisely what we do find. I have alluded to the letter of John van Schoonhoven to his nephew Simon, who was Prior of Eymsteyn when the Windesheimers went thither for instruction. I have also referred to the treatise on the *Life and Passion of our Divine Lord,* given in Busch's *Chronicle of Windesheim,* as well as to the spiritual

* Thomae Kempensis De Imitatione Christi Libri quatuor. Carolus Hirsche. Berolini: Carolus Habel, 1874.

maxims of Groot and Radewyn, recorded by Thomas à Kempis.

If we place these works side by side with *The Imitation* we find that the latter reproduces them abundantly, often sentence for sentence, and word for word. From this we are driven to the irresistible conclusion, that the author of *The Imitation* drew copiously from the writings of the School of Windesheim. What can be more natural than that he, Thomas à Kempis, the leading exponent of that school, should put forth in his great masterpiece the doctrines with which he was so familiar?

The process of tracing the teaching of Windesheim into *The Imitation* was long since commenced, and has been carefully worked out by Amort, Malou, Santini, Spitzen, and others, and more especially by Becker. For a full exposition of this topic I would refer to the works of the writers named, and particularly to Becker's admirable treatise, part ii., chap. iv. The limits of this essay allow me to give but a few illustrations. I shall place sentences from the authors named side by side with quotations from *The Imitation*:—

Johannes Van Schoonhoven.	De Imitatione Christi.
In primis ergo scire debes, quod vita nostra in peregrinatione hac *non potest esse sine* periculo et *tentatione*, quia, ut dicit B. *Job, militia est vita hominis super terram.*	Quamdiu in mundo vivimus *sine* tribulatione *et tentatione esse non possumus.* Unde in *Job* scriptum est: *Tentatio est vita humana super terram.*

Juxta verbum S. Augustini *ama nesciri.*

Unde poeta: Crede mihi, bene qui *latuit* bene vixit.*

Sed juxta doctrinam Senecae cunctis esto benignus, nemini blandus, paucis familiaris, omnibus aequus.

Hieronymus: *Tantum* virtutis tibi adjicies, *quantum* voluntati propriae detraxeris.

Pax est *in cella, foris* autem non nisi bella.

Nemo secure apparet, nisi qui libenter latet. Nemo secure praeest nisi qui libenter subest. Nemo secure loquitur, nisi qui libenter tacet.

Humilitas, ut dicit S. Bernardus, virtus est, in qua quis in sui verissima cognitione *sibi vilescit.*

Principiis obsta, sero medicina paratur.†

Si vis utiliter aliquid scire et discere *ama nesciri* et pro nihilo reputari.

Facilius est domi *latere* quam foris se posse sufficienter custodire.

Caritas habenda est ad *omnes* sed familiaritas non expedit.

Tantum proficies, *quantum* tibi ipsi vim intuleris.

In cella invenies quod *deforis* saepius amittes. . . . Mane cum eo [Jesu] *in cella,* quia non invenies alibi tantam pacem.

Nemo secure apparet, nisi qui libenter latet. Nemo secure loquitur, nisi qui libenter tacet. Nemo secure praeest nisi qui libenter subest.

Qui bene *seipsum* cognoscit, *sibi* ipsi *vilescit.*

Principiis obsta: sero medicina paratur.

Gerardus Groot.

Semper debes niti aliquod boni notare et cogitare de alio. Quanto plus homo scit se distare a perfectione tam prope est perfectioni.

De Imitatione Christi.

De se ipso nihil tenere, et de aliis semper bene et alte sentire: magna sapientia est et alta perfectio.

* Ovid. Tristia, lib. iii. Elegia iv. 25.
† Ovid. Remedium Amoris, 91.

Item, nullam artem studere, nullum librum facere . . . ad dilatandum famam meam et *nomen scientiae* meae. Item, secundum Bernardum, nullum verbum proferas, de quo multum religiosus vel scientificus appareas.

Maxima tentatio est non tentari.

Nec unquam velis habere *nomen scientiae.*

Nunquam ad hoc legas verbum ut doctior aut sapientior possis videri.

Sunt tamen tentationes homini saepe valde utiles, . . . quia in illis homo humiliatur, et purgatur, et eruditur.

FLORENTIUS RADEWYN.

Quam bene vobis est et quam *secure statis*, quod potestis sic vivere sub obedientia.

Semper sis vigilans *circa tentationem* et motus passionum.

Et prae omnibus debet niti ut omnes homines *reputet* sanctiores et meliores se.

Omnia fierent homini dulcia si se bene *exerceret in passione Dominica.*

DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI.

Multo *tutius* est *stare* in subjectione quam in praelatura.

Ideo unusquisque sollicitus esse deberet *circa tentationes* suas.

Non *reputes* te aliquid profecisse nisi omnibus inferiorem te esse sentias.

Religiosus, qui se intente et devote in sanctissima *passione Domini exercet*, omnia utilia et necessaria sibi abundanter inveniet.

EPISTOLA DE VITA ET PASSIONE DOMINI NOSTRI JESU CHRISTI.

(*Used as a spiritual handbook by the Congregation of Windesheim, at the recommendation of Vos van Huesden.*)

Ama nesciri et ab aliis contemni opta.

Ante initium operis *propone* qualiter te vis habere.

DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI.

Ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari.

Bonus et devotus homo opera sua prius intus *disponit* quae foris agere debet.

Qui autem student magis videri subtiles quam esse humiles, et plus quaerunt *scire quam bene vivere*, cito extolluntur et sunt carnales.	*Quia vero plures magis student scire quam bene vivere*, ideo saepe errant et pene nullum, vel modicum fructum ferunt.
Qui in tribulatione sunt et angustia, noli negligere eis servire et consolatorius esse.	Et cum tentato noli duriter agere, sed consolationem ingere.
Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus.	Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.
. . . quamvis haberet et *sciret omnem Bibliam*, et Scripturam, et Legem unquam positam aut conscriptam, id minime sufficeret.	Si *scires totam Bibliam* exterius et omnium philosophorum dicta, quid totum tibi prodesset?
Ad externa officia nullatenus, dilecte frater, aspires, nec aliquam *praelaturam* affectes.	Multo tutius est stare in subjectione quam in *praelatura*.
Humilis corde sis et apparatu, et nimis multum non *teneas* de te ipso.	Haec est altissima et utilissima lectio, sui ipsius vera cognitio et despectio, de se ipso nihil *tenere*.

It is impossible to study these parallelisms (existing between the writings emanating from the "Circle of "Windesheim" and *The Imitation of Christ*), which I may observe might be multiplied indefinitely, without arriving at the conclusion that the latter is a "rapia-"rium," or handbook, in which the former are collected, digested, and reduced to system. It may be argued by the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis that the writers named quoted from a previously existing codex of *The Imitation*, which Thomas copied subsequently. This idea defies all human probability, because if *The Imitation* existed previous to the time when van Schoonhoven wrote his letter to his nephew Simon, he would

have quoted it *directly*, in place of which we find that he cites St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Jerome, St. Gregory, Seneca, and others. From this it is evident that it is à Kempis who quotes from van Schoonhoven, and not the latter from *The Imitation*. This point is demonstrated satisfactorily by Becker in his masterly essay (pages 180–186).

The present appears a suitable time to consider the precise relation, as author, in which à Kempis stands to *The Imitation of Christ*. It seems evident that he was not the sole or original author in the ordinary sense of the word. On the other hand, it is equally manifest that he was the skilled arranger and compiler of the doctrines it teaches. The word "com-"posuit" which Busch uses bears out this view, and still more pointedly the term "compilavit" which Hermann Ryd adopts. Some old manuscripts exhibit Ryd's phrase—for example, those quoted by Santini in the second part of his work (pages 218 and 241), proving that this interpretation of Thomas' relation to the book was held in ancient times.

We have already seen how largely *The Imitation* partakes of Scriptural inspiration, as well as of the teaching of the "Circle of Windesheim." These are by no means the only sources from which it draws. I have been for some years engaged in an endeavour to demonstrate the very extended basis upon which it is founded, and hope at no distant period to lay my researches before the public. For the present I shall not attempt to develop this subject, as it would swell

my essay beyond reasonable limits. However, as an illustration, I give in the appendix * a single chapter, taken at random (book i., chap. i.), in which I show how largely à Kempis has availed himself both of the Holy Scriptures and of the works of St. Bernard. This fragment may be taken as a specimen of the whole. The abundant use which is made of the works of St. Bernard in *The Imitation* is a point in reference to its authorship scarcely less significant than its derivation from the writers of the "Circle of Windes-"heim." We can understand this fully when we remember that the founders and leading authorities of the school of Windesheim were all very conversant with the works of the Great Abbot of Clairvaux. I have already drawn attention to this fact. Busch tells us, in his account of the death of Gerard Groot, how that holy man revered St. Bernard. Vos van Huesden and the brothers John and Thomas à Kempis had made selections from his works, and Florentius Radewyn speaks of him in terms of enthusiastic admiration.† All this prepares us for the marked similarity in thought and feeling which we observe between the works of St. Bernard and *The Imitation* (which appears to have been the outcome of the teaching of the "Circle of Windesheim"), and constitutes a remarkable indirect argument in favour

* Appendix C.

† See Chronicle of Windesheim, pp. 23, 408, 432, 433; also, the life of Groot by Thomas à Kempis, chap. xvi., and that of the latter by Rosweyd.

of à Kempis, the leading writer of that school. To conclude this point, let me observe here that à Kempis is the *only* candidate in whose favour we can discover one particle of internal evidence, excepting alone St. Bernard, who, as we already know, could not have been the writer.

It seems to me that I have already adduced sufficient evidence in support of the claims of the holy Canon of Agnetenberg to justify my belief, and even moral certainty, that he was the author of *The Imitation of Christ;* so we may proceed to consider the arguments which have been raised by those who undertake to put forward the other two candidates—namely, John Charlier de Gerson, and the so-called Abbot Gersen of Vercelli.

If, for a few hours, we imagine ourselves transported back amidst the turbulent scenes which convulsed central Europe in the early part of the fifteenth century, it will not be difficult to understand how John Charlier de Gerson, the mighty Chancellor of the University of Paris, came to be looked upon as a possible author of *The Imitation of Christ.* He lived near the time when the book appeared; he was a prominent figure in the great religious upheaval of that dark epoch; he was greatly revered—ay, venerated—despite some errors of judgment; and, in addition, he was a versatile and copious writer on spiritual subjects.

While the saintly Canon of Agnetenberg was scarcely known beyond the limits of his own Congre-

gation, the world rang with the praise and renown of the "Doctor Christianissimus," who was, in turn, the favourite and the persecuted of princes; the dauntless enemy of heresy and corruption; the guiding spirit of Councils—nay, even the deposer of the very Pope himself. Withal, the more deeply we search into his character, history, and writings, the more evident it becomes that *The Imitation* never emanated from his gifted and prolific pen. This great man's life is too well known to need reproduction here—at all events, in any extended form. A page or two will suffice to recapitulate the main features of his magnificent, though sad and troubled, career.*

John Charlier, otherwise known as John Charlier de Gerson, Johannes Gersonus, Gersone, Jarson, Jarsone, Gersem, or Gersen, was born on the 14th of December, 1363, at the village of Gerson, near Rheims, from whence he takes his surname. His parents, Arnulph Charlier and Elizabeth de la Chardenière, belonged to a humble class, were eminently pious, and had the consolation of seeing seven of their twelve children devoting themselves to the service of God in religious life. John, the eldest of the family, was sent to Paris when about fourteen years old. After five years' study in the historic College of Navarre, he

* The reader will find ample details of the life of John Charlier de Gerson in the British Encyclopædia, and in the Biographie Universelle, par F. X. Feller (Paris: Gaume Frères, 1847). Also in De Grégory's Histoire, etc., vol. i., pp. 261–310; and in Thomassy's Jean Gerson et le grand schisme d'occident (Paris: Périsse Frères, 1852).

obtained the degree of Licentiate in Arts, and then began his theological studies under the direction of Giles des Champs and Peter D'Ailly, then Chancellor of the University of Paris, and afterwards Bishop of Puy, Archbishop of Cambrai, and Cardinal.

Gerson seems at a very early period to have attracted the notice of the authorities of the University. In 1383 he was elected Procurator, and re-elected the following year. In 1384 he took his degree as Bachelor, and in 1392 as Doctor of Theology. In 1395, when Peter D'Ailly was appointed Bishop of Puy, Gerson, at the early age of thirty-two, was elected Chancellor of the University of Paris and made Canon of Notre Dame.

This famous University was then in the zenith of its glory, and its Chancellor was of necessity one of the foremost men in Europe, bearing in his hands the destinies of the vast crowd of students from all parts of the world who flocked to its halls and sought its distinctions. Gerson's writings feelingly portray his deep sense of the responsibilities, anxieties, and troubles of his exalted position. Oftentimes he seems to have been weary of the burden. It involved him in perpetual strife, and, being a purely honorary post, in monetary difficulties, and forced him into public life, while he yearned for leisure to pursue his studies. Accordingly, we find him, in 1400, accepting from the Duke of Burgundy, to whom he was almoner, and whose friendship and protection he then enjoyed, the Deanery of the Cathedral of Bruges. This position,

with its prospects of comparative independence, does not appear to have suited his aspirations, and within a couple of years he returned to Paris and the Chancellorship of the University. From the time when Gerson left Bruges we find him continuously occupied in strife and contention, endeavouring to promote reformation amongst the clergy and laity, to remodel the course of studies in the University, and absorbed in the struggle to terminate the appalling scandal of his time—the papal schism—the great schism of the West. He appears as the delegate to popes and anti-popes, the leader amongst leaders at Pisa and Constance, swaying the destinies of councils, pontiffs, and of the Church itself.

At last we come to his downfall, wherein his true nobility shines forth. When John Petit essayed to defend the murder of the Duke of Orleans, of which foul deed the reckless Duke of Burgundy, "Jean sans "Peur," was avowedly guilty, Gerson, with all the grandeur of his lofty character, sacrificed the favour of his patron, and denounced the false plea set forth to shield him. Again at Constance he returned to the charge, and proved the indefensibility of the murder.

From that hour, through terror of his former potent ally, he became an exile from France, and, donning a pilgrim's habit and grasping a staff, he wandered through Lower Germany and Austria, until the tragic death of the Duke of Burgundy permitted his return home.

Disgusted with public life, and unwilling to re-enter its arena, Gerson sought an asylum with his brother, who was then Prior of the Celestinians at Lyons. There, in peaceful retirement, he spent the remaining years of his life, praying, writing, and teaching little children, asking only from his pupils "a prayer for "poor Gerson." He died in 1429, and was buried in the Church of St. Laurence, at Lyons. On his tomb were inscribed the words, "*Poenitemini et credite "Evangelio.*" *

Such in a few sentences was the history of the mighty Chancellor Gerson, who, despite his errors of judgment, and the terrible vicissitudes of his chequered career, was undoubtedly one of the grandest characters of the Middle Ages. I am aware that many judge him more unfavourably than I can,† but the circumstances in which he was placed must be remembered, and due allowance made. It is needless, however, to observe how utterly incompatible the life I have sketched, spent in ceaseless political and polemical warfare, is with the authorship of such a book as *The Imitation*, which throughout exhibits tranquillity, contemplation, and absorption in God—attributes only possible for the work of one who had passed many years in the cloister in meditation and prayer. The bare idea seems absurd, but still it is beyond question that Gerson has been

* Jean de Gerson, par Henri Jadart. Rheims: Deligne et Renart, 1881.

† Appendices à la Brochure publiée par Thomas Brunton, pp. 22–24. Paris: Charles Maréchal, 1874.

accredited with its paternity, and has found advocates of learning and earnestness.

How came this to pass? We know that *The Imitation* appeared anonymously in the first third of the fifteenth century. Immediately before that period Gerson was one of the most prominent figures in Europe, and his spiritual writings were spread broadcast and highly appreciated. It so happened, moreover, that in more than one instance his essay, *De Meditatione Cordis*, was bound up in the same volume with the *Imitatio Christi*.*

Herein seems to lie the whole explanation. The obscurity of Thomas à Kempis, the prominence of Gerson, and the ignorance of transcribers, led to *The Imitation*, whose author was unknown, being attributed to the Chancellor whose *Meditatio Cordis* was familiar to many. The error, once promulgated, grew apace as manuscripts were reproduced, and doubtless the exalted reputation of the supposed author caused the book to be read and valued more, and consequently a better investment for the labour of copyists, and, later on, of printers and publishers. We shall now examine Gerson's claims, show how baseless they are, and con-

* To quote two out of many instances, I would refer to the Codex de Advocatis, of which we shall see more later; and also the Codex Lechassier, which is described at p. liv. of the preface to Gence's Latin edition of The Imitation of Christ (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1826). I am indebted to my friend, Dr. T. More Madden, for this latter valuable work, which he generously gave me in memory of his lamented father, Dr. R. R. Madden, one of the most erudite scholars of our time, who had amassed a rare collection of books treating upon the literature of this subject.

trast them with those of à Kempis. It will be most convenient to discuss them in the order in which we have studied those of the holy Canon of Mount St. Agnes.

I.—*Contemporary Witnesses.*

I have quoted thirteen, out of more than twenty, who bear testimony in favour of à Kempis. For Gerson there is *not a single one.* Nay, more, the reader will recollect that Mauburn, Schott, Simus, Lambert, and Danhausser, while testifying in favour of Thomas, state positively *that Gerson was not the author* of *The Imitation of Christ.*

More crushing even than their statements is the negative evidence of Gerson's brother, and of Jacques de Ciresio, the Chancellor's secretary and intimate friend. John Gerson, the brother and namesake of the Chancellor, with whom the latter spent the closing years of his life, was Prior of the Celestinians at Lyons. In 1423, six years before the death of his illustrious guest, he was requested by a member of his Order, Brother Anselm, to draw up a correct list of Gerson's works. He did so with the utmost precision, but in that catalogue *we do not find "The Imitation" mentioned.* Later on, in 1429, about the time of the Chancellor's death, Ciresio added a note to the catalogue, pointing out the treatises which he admired most, with other details, but of *"The Imitation" he says not one word.**

* Malou, pp. 365–370.

It is not within the range of possibility that these two men, one the brother, and the other the secretary and devoted friend of the Chancellor, both of whom were responsible for the list of his works, would have omitted to mention *The Imitation* if he were its author. *Their silence is, beyond evasion, a crushing blow to Gerson's pretensions.* It may be argued in explanation that two contemporaries of Thomas à Kempis, while uttering his praises, omit to mention that he was the author of *The Imitation.* These are the continuator of the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes,* whom we have already quoted, and the author of a very brief anonymous memorandum which we find at page 388 of Malou's work. A little careful examination shows that there is no parallelism between the cases. Gerson's brother and Ciresio were responsible for a *correct list of the Chancellor's works;* the others merely alluded to à Kempis in a very passing way.

The continuator does not name one of his works, but speaks of them collectively in terms which certainly are applicable to *The Imitation* :—" Insuper composuit " varios tractatulos ad aedificationem juvenum in plano " et simplici stylo, sed praegrandes in sententia et operis " efficacia." The author of the memorandum given by Malou mentions only one of Thomas' works, the treatise *De Disciplina Claustralium,* to which it would seem he was specially directing attention, because his words are as follows :—" Anno Domini MCCCCXLIIII. " adhuc vixit auctor *hujus* tractatus (*De Disciplina* " *Claustralium*), frater Thomas Canonicus Regularis,"

etc. A few lines further on he adds the following remark, which certainly is very applicable if intended to refer to *The Imitation* :—" In loquendo vel scribendo " magis curabat affectum inflammare quam acuere " intellectum."

In fine, the more closely we examine this point the more evident it becomes that it was equally natural for these contemporaries of à Kempis to omit in their cursory observations any special allusion to *The Imitation*, and impossible for the Celestinian Prior and Ciresio to do so if Gerson was the author. So far as I can discover, not a single edition of Gerson's works, ancient or modern, contains *The Imitation ;* on the other hand, we find it in nearly all the editions of à Kempis' works which pretend to give his compositions in full. It is absent from the Utrecht edition of 1473, which, however, only gives the author's "Opera Varia."

Withal, as I have stated, Gerson has found from time to time, principally amongst his compatriots, learned and brilliant advocates. The most important are Camus, Dupin, Gence, Tourlet, Onésime Leroy, Corneille, Monfalcon, Carton, Thomassy, Vert, and Darche. Of all, Gence is the most erudite and philosophical, and yet the perusal of his remarkable essay * leaves the reader under the conviction that this learned writer pleads for an impossible theory.

The most recent champions of the great Chancellor

* Nouvelles Considérations Historiques et Critiques sur l'Auteur et le Livre de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, par J. B. M. Gence. Paris : Treuttel et Würtz, 1832.

are Vert * and Darche.† Doubtless they have availed themselves to the utmost of the researches of their predecessors, so we need not travel beyond their writings. If deficient in solid argument they certainly are not wanting in vivacity of imagination or boldness of assertion. As a specimen of M. Vert's method of reasoning, let us see what he says of "contemporary "witnesses" for the claims of Gerson. He tells us (*Études*, etc., chap. vi.) that numbers are forthcoming—"rien qu'à se guider sur les indices contemporains, "les témoins se lèvent nombreux." As a matter of fact, what do his "contemporary witnesses" amount to?

First. Louis Gonzales (who lived about a century and a half after the death of Gerson) says that St. Ignatius of Loyola always carried with him his "Gerson," or *Imitation of Christ.*

Secondly. A Memoir, edited by the Jesuits about 1570 (one hundred and forty years after Gerson's death), points out as a work greatly prized by the Society of Jesus, *The Imitation of Christ*, attributing it to Gerson.

Thirdly. He quotes Luca Pinelli, an Italian Jesuit, whose works appeared about the year 1600—that is, one hundred and seventy years after Gerson's death—who also attributes *The Imitation* to Gerson.

Such are Vert's *numerous contemporary witnesses!*

* Études Historiques et Critiques sur l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, par G. Ch. M. Vert. Toulouse: Privat, 1856. This is the principal among a series of works upon the subject by the same author.

† Clé de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, par Jean Darche. Paris: E. Thorin, 1875.

I think it would scarcely repay the reader were I to carry him in detail through the mazes of M. Vert's arguments, the cogency of which may be fairly gauged by the foregoing specimen.

Respecting M. Darche's strange essay, I find it difficult to offer an opinion. It appears to be the rhapsody of an enthusiast, and his contentions, reduced to a point, amount to this, that Gerson was a great and good man, an eminent spiritual writer, and therefore must have been the author of *The Imitation*.

Of the good faith of the Gersonists, as represented by Vert and Darche, I entertain no doubt, but I am equally certain that no reasoning being could accept their views.

II.—*External Evidence of Manuscripts.*

The earliest dated manuscript of *The Imitation* which attributes it to Gerson is the Sangermanensis. It is signed 1460, thirty-one years after the death of the supposed author.* The Florentine manuscripts of 1464 and 1466 give his name as John Ger*sen*, Parisian Chancellor.† So also do the Verona ‡ and the Wolfenbuttel.§ The Padolironensis codex also gives his name as Ger*sen*, and his epitaph.‖

This fact should be carefully borne in mind, as we shall see its importance later on—viz., that the name of the Parisian Chancellor is frequently written Ger*sen*.

* Santini, 2ndª parte, p. 266.
† Ibid., p. 245.
‡ Ibid., p. 271.
§ Ibid., p. 250.
‖ Ibid., 1ª parte, p. 99.

As to the undated manuscripts bearing Gerson's name (howsoever spelt), there is not one which shows evidence of being written earlier than the fifteenth century, and not the earliest portion of it. I need not dilate upon this topic. We have already discussed the value of the undated manuscripts. Adding together the various codices which give the name of Gerson, Gersem, Gersen, Gers, etc.—all of which evidently point to the Chancellor of Paris—we find that they amount to about thirty.

When we call to mind these facts, we are in a position to estimate the preponderating external evidence of manuscripts in favour of à Kempis and against Gerson. While the great Chancellor was one of the most prominent characters of his day, and a well-known and prolific spiritual writer, we find some thirty manuscripts giving his name, but not one during his life or for many years after his death. On the other hand, in favour of the obscure Monk of Agnetenberg, who was unknown beyond his Congregation, we find a greater number of manuscripts pointing to him, a considerable proportion written during his life, and one in his own handwriting (dated 1441) placed at the head of a series of spiritual treatises which we have no reason to doubt were of his own composition.

Before leaving the subject of the manuscripts advanced in favour of Gerson, I must allude to the theory raised by the Abbé Dufresnoy, and defended by Onésime Leroy, and later by Vert.

There exists in the library of Valenciennes a

manuscript, in French, containing some works of Gerson, to which his name is appended, and also the three first books of *The Imitation of Christ* under the title of *L'Internelle Consolation*, to which no name is attached. Some partisans of Gerson, including several of those named above, argue that the book of *L'Internelle Consolation* is by Gerson, and that he wrote it in French. Their contention does not bear examination. The Valenciennes manuscript is dated 1462, and is almost identical with another manuscript existing in the library of Amiens, dated 1447, which the transcriber *avows to be a translation from Latin into French.* There is good evidence, moreover, to show that both manuscripts are attributable to the same individual—namely, David Aubert, a native of Hesdin.

Now, as the earliest of these manuscripts dates eighteen years subsequent to the death of Gerson, and the other no less than thirty-three years after that event, it seems futile to contend that they assist his candidature. Monseigneur Malou discusses this subject with great care, and demonstrates satisfactorily that the manuscripts in question are a very clumsy French translation of *The Imitation*, which, as we know, was extant in Latin twenty years before the date of the earliest of them.*

III.—*Internal Evidence.*

When we examine *The Imitation of Christ* and the works of John Gerson, with a view to discovering

* Malou, pp. 306–325.

a similarity between the two, we find instead a diametrical opposition. We have already seen the remarkable parallelism which exists between *The Imitation* and the works of Thomas à Kempis—in style, peculiarities of language, including unusual words, idioms, unique punctuation, derivation from the writers of Windesheim, and so forth. When, on the other hand, we study the works of the great Chancellor, we are struck by the manifest contrast in every particular. In vain do we seek for the peculiarities of language and train of thought which characterize *The Imitation* and à Kempis' other compositions. They are nowhere to be found. Gerson is decidedly scholastic—*The Imitation* is the very reverse. Gerson is diffuse, verbose, involved—*The Imitation* is terse, epigrammatic, and transparently clear. Gerson is grandiloquent, didactic, arid, and but rarely devotional—*The Imitation* is homely, sympathetic, and full of unction at every page. Gerson deals mostly with theory and reason—*The Imitation* is always practical, and appeals to the heart.

If we take the *Meditatio Cordis* as a specimen of Gerson's spiritual teaching, and read it side by side with *The Imitation*, it becomes evident that the two never emanated from the same source. I quote this particular essay because its subject is somewhat congenial, and thus it affords a fair ground for comparison.

This striking diversity of style constitutes an argument against the great Chancellor which is *per se* conclusive and unanswerable. Authors vary in the power and merit of their compositions, but style is an

individuality and unalterable. Gerson's style asserts itself throughout his works as consistently as à Kempis' pervades *The Imitation* and his other writings, and no wider contrast could be imagined than what we find between the productions of these two great teachers. It would seem to me as reasonable to attribute *The Pilgrim's Progress* to Gibbon, or the *Dialogues of Lucian* to Xenophon, as to affirm that *The Imitation* was the work of the Chancellor of Paris.

Cardinal Newman touches this subject with his well-known perspicuity and force. Speaking of the individuality with which every man of genius expresses his ideas and feelings in language, he says: ". . . he "gives utterance to them all,—in a corresponding "language, which is as multiform as this inward mental "action itself and analogous to it, the faithful expres- "sion of his intense personality, attending on his own "inward world of thought as its very shadow; so that "we might as well say that one man's shadow was "another's, as that the style of a really gifted mind can "belong to any but himself. It follows him about *as* "a shadow. His thought and feeling are personal, "and so his language is personal.

" Thought and speech are inseparable from each "other. Matter and expression are parts of one: "style is a thinking out into language." *

* Lectures and Essays on University Subjects, by Cardinal Newman, p. 41. London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1859.

Besides the foregoing irreconcilable differences between *The Imitation* and the works of Gerson, there is still another of overwhelming importance. The author of *The Imitation* wrote for the instruction of those in religious life. For à Kempis this was natural, but Gerson could not have ventured upon such ground, because from first to last he was only a secular priest, involved throughout his life in turbulent scenes of political and polemical strife.

Let us review a few passages in *The Imitation* which clearly define the author's design :—

"Thou must learn to break thine own will in many "things, if thou wilt keep peace and concord with "others.

"It is no small matter to dwell in monasteries or "in a congregation, and to live therein without reproof, "and to persevere faithful till death.

"Blessed is he who has lived well in that same "place, and made a happy end.

* * * * * *

"The habit and the tonsure contribute little; it is "a change of manners and an entire mortification of "the passions that make a true religious." *

"Oh, how great was the fervour of all religious in "the beginning of their holy institution!

"Oh, how great their devotion in prayer! How "great their zeal for virtue!

* Book i., chap. xvii.

"What great discipline was in force amongst "them! What great reverence and obedience in all "flourished under the rule of a superior!" *

"The life of a good religious ought to be eminent "in all virtues, so that he may be such inwardly as he "appears to men outwardly.

"And with good reason ought he to be much more "within than he appears without; because he who "beholds us is God, of whom we ought exceedingly to "stand in awe wherever we are, and to walk pure as "angels in his sight.

"We ought every day to renew our resolution, and "to rouse ourselves to fervour, as if it were the first "day of our conversion, . . ." †

"No man rules safely but he who is willingly ruled.

"No man safely commands but he who has learnt "well to obey.

* * * * * *

"Thou wilt find in thy cell what thou wilt often "lose abroad.

"Thy cell, if thou continue in it, grows sweet; but, "if thou keep not to it, it becomes wearisome.

"If in the beginning of thy conversion thou didst "well inhabit and keep thy cell, it will be to thee ever "after a dear friend and a most welcome solace." ‡

"Be vigilant and diligent in the service of God,

* Book i., chap. xviii. † Ibid., chap. xix.
‡ Ibid., chap. xx.

"and often think for what end thou camest hither, and "why thou hast left the world. Was it not that thou "mightest live to God and become a spiritual man?

* * * * * *

"How do so many other religious, who live under "strict monastic discipline?

"They seldom go abroad, they live retired, their "diet is very poor, their habit coarse, they labour "much, they speak little, they watch long, they rise "early, they spend much time in prayer, they read "often, and keep themselves in all discipline.

"Consider the Carthusians, the Cistercians, and "the monks and nuns of divers Orders; how every "night they rise to sing psalms to the Lord.

"It would therefore be a shame for thee to be "sluggish in so holy an exercise, when such a multi- "tude of religious begin to cry aloud to God." *

"Turn thyself with thy whole heart to the Lord "and forsake this miserable world, and thy soul shall "find rest."†

"Thou hast shown mercy beyond all hope to thy "servant, and beyond all my desert bestowed thy grace "and friendship on me.

"What return shall I make to thee for this grace? "for it is not granted to all to forsake all things, to "renounce the world and take on them the monastic "life." ‡

* Book i., chap. xxv. † Book ii., chap. i. ‡ Book iii., chap. x.

"I have received the cross, I have received it from "thy hand; I will bear it; and bear it unto death, as "thou hast laid it upon me.

"Verily, the life of a good monk is a cross, but it "leads him to paradise." *

"Be neither too long nor too hasty in celebrating, "but observe the good common way of those with "whom thou livest.

"Thou oughtest not to cause inconvenience or "weariness to others, but to keep the common way "according to the appointment of superiors; and rather "to consult the profit of others, than thine own devo- "tion or inclination." †

It seems needless to dilate further on the proofs that Gerson was not the author of *The Imitation of Christ*. However, before leaving the subject I would refer all interested in it to the remarkably clear and solid refutation of the great Chancellor's claims which we find in the essays of two recent French writers—namely, M. Arthur Loth ‡ and Monseigneur Puyol.§

The third candidate for the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, whose pretensions we must discuss, is John Gersen, the supposed Benedictine Abbot

* Book iii., chap. lvi. † Book iv., chap. x.

‡ Revue des Questions Historiques, vol. xiii., pp. 580–616. Paris: 1873.

§ La Doctrine du Livre De Imitatione Christi, par M. l'Abbé Puyol, pp. 418–439. Paris: Bray et Retaux, 1881.

of Vercelli, who is stated to have written the book in the first half of the thirteenth century.

Hitherto we have dealt with individuals about whose existence there can be no doubt. Thomas à Kempis and John Charlier de Gerson were realities beyond question, and whatever may have been their relation to *The Imitation of Christ*, no one can deny at all events that they lived and did great work in the field of spiritual literature. This much cannot be averred of John Gersen. His first appearance before the world dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century (some four hundred years subsequent to his asserted existence), and came to pass after this fashion.

In the year 1604, in a House of the Jesuits at Arona, on the Lago Maggiore, Father Bernard Rossignoli, S. J., found an undated manuscript of *The Imitation of Christ.* This was the famous Arona Codex.* At the end of the fourth book is written, "Explicit liber "quartus et ultimus Abbatis Johannis Gersen de sacra-"mento altaris." In other portions of the manuscript the author is named Gessen or Geshen once (the name being here very difficult to decipher), and Gessen thrice. As this House of the Jesuits had formerly been a monastery of the Benedictines, Father Rossignoli imagined that the book belonged to their library, and leaped to the conclusion that it originated with that great Order. Very precipitately, as subsequent events proved, he put forward the Codex as such, and thus gave origin to a most extraordinary fable.

* De Grégory, Histoire, etc., vol. ii., chap. viii.

In the year 1617, Father Majoli, another Jesuit who had made his noviceship at Arona, hearing the story, came forward and made *a declaration,* to the effect that it was he who had brought the Codex to Arona from his paternal home in Genoa!* Thus Father Rossignoli's idea was proved to be a delusion. However, Majoli's avowal came too late to prevent a vexatious controversy. The manuscript had fallen into the hands of Constantine Cajetan, an enthusiastic Benedictine, who, in his anxiety to add to the abundant laurels of his Order the paternity of the great treasure, actually published it in Rome in 1616, asserting that it was the work of "the Venerable John Gessen, a "Benedictine Abbot." In a second edition, brought out in 1618, he rebaptized the imaginary author as John Gersen," which appellation has survived to the present day.†

It was useless to argue that the word Gersen was a common mode, as we have seen, of writing the name of Gerson, the Parisian Chancellor—that it was quite natural to style him "Abbot," as he was actually Abbé commendataire of St. Jean-en-Grève;‡ the new interpretation suited the novel craze, and must be worked out to the bitter end. Without disparaging Cajetan, we may truthfully say that he carried his enthusiasm to folly, as may be seen by the facts related con-

* Amort, Plena ac Succincta Informatio de Statu totius Controversiae, etc., p. 169. Augsburg: Bissoni, 1725.

† Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 5–11.

‡ Gence, Nouvelles Considérations, etc., p. 33, note i.; also Waterton, pp. 5–7.

cerning him by Malou and others.* At all events, the new candidate was launched upon the world, and all the powers of the great Order of St. Benedict were put forward in the effort to substantiate his claim. Immediately on the appearance of Cajetan's edition of *The Imitation*, Heribert Rosweyd, a learned Belgian Jesuit, took up the challenge and published his *Vindiciae Kempenses*, which remains to this day one of the ablest essays ever written on the subject, and a model for controversialists. It had no effect, however, on the enthusiastic sponsor of John Gersen.

As no one had ever heard before of such an individual as the new candidate, it became necessary to give him a habitation, a country, a birthplace—aye, and even a portrait. All this was done by a series of processes indicating more fertile imagination than historical accuracy.

A copy of *The Imitation*, printed in Venice and dated 1501, gave the needful clue. Upon this volume some unknown writer had traced the following note:— "Hunc librum non compilavit Johannes Gerson, sed D. "Johannes . . . Abbas Vercellensis . . . ut habetur "usque hodie propria manu scriptus in eadem abbatia." This was enough for Cajetan. John Gersen, as a matter of course, was Abbot of Vercelli, and an Italian! It mattered nothing that the name of the asserted Vercellese author was not given; possibly, too, the fact was overlooked that this written note is un-

* Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 5–10.

doubtedly falsified, as Delfau and Naudé declare.* The idea fitted Cajetan's wishes, and therefore must be true.

By-and-by it became necessary to find a birthplace for Gersen. That was easily done. A manuscript of *The Imitation* (the Allacianus †), which attributes the book to John Tambaco, a learned Dominican of the fourteenth century, answered this want perfectly. Tambaco, misread by confusion between the letters T and C, gave the author as John Cambaco, or Canabaco, and this word, by a process wholly unknown to philology, was metamorphosed into Cavaglia, a village near Vercelli, in which Gersen was stated to have been born!

The next necessity was to provide a portrait of the newly discovered hero. This likewise was accomplished without delay. The so-called *Codex Cavensis* has a picture of a monk painted within the letter Q at the commencement of the first sentence, "Qui sequitur me." This picture is stated by the Gersenists to represent a Benedictine monk—no other than John Gersen! They ignored the circumstance that this manuscript bears neither name nor date, and that there is strong evidence that it never belonged to the Benedictine Monastery of La Cava, in the kingdom of Naples.‡ Even in 1833

* F. F. Delfau, Libri De Imitatione Christi Johanni Gerseni Abbati ord. S. Benedicti iterato adserti, pp. 92, 93. Parisiis: Apud L. Brillaine, 1674. Also Becker, p. 56 and following. Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 286.

† Santini, parte prima, p. 101; Becker, pp. 58–61.

‡ See Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 135.

an enthusiastic Gersenist, the Chevalier de Grégory, enlarged it, and placed it as a frontispiece to his edition of *The Imitation of Christ!*

Let us here recapitulate. By Father Rossignoli's proven error in supposing that the Arona Codex ever belonged to the Benedictine library at Arona; by the blunder of a copyist so ill informed that he spells the supposed author's name in three different ways, and calls him Abbot; and by the vivid imagination of Dom Cajetan;—we have the new candidate put forward as the Venerable John Gersen, Abbot of the Benedictine Order. By a falsified and utterly worthless note in the Venice edition we find him Abbot of Vercelli, and therefore an Italian; by a misreading of the name of John Tambaco we find him born at Cavaglia; and, finally, by a *coup de main* of extravagant fancy, we have his portrait manufactured out of the illuminated Q in the so-called *Codex Cavensis!*

Verily, what more could be needed to prove Gersen's existence and claim to the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ!*

Still we must follow Cajetan's eccentricities a little further. The question will be asked, When did Gersen flourish as Abbot of Vercelli? Probably with the idea of ante-dating *The Imitation of Christ*, so as to put Thomas à Kempis and John Charlier de Gerson out of the field, the new candidate was referred to the thirteenth century. Most certainly the Arona manuscript never justified such an assumption, all competent authorities referring it to the fifteenth century. How-

ever, careful search was made, which proved that in neither of the monasteries of Vercelli—St. Andrew's, belonging to the Canons Regular, and St. Stephen's, the Benedictine Convent—was there any record of an abbot of the name of John Gersen.* All this made no matter, Dom Cajetan and a host of Benedictines held to the myth—the Augustinian Canons Regular could not abandon the just and solid claims of Thomas à Kempis. Accordingly two powerful Orders entered the lists, partisans joined the fray on both sides, the *mêlée* became European, and thus was inaugurated the most extraordinary controversy known in the history of literature. In process of time, popes, cardinals, bishops, priests, and laymen, of various nationalities, were drawn into the battle. Congresses were held, and various decisions arrived at. The Congregation of the Index, and even the Parliament of Paris, were appealed to, and many bitter personal quarrels arose. Still, while partisans and theorists lived and died, the truth gradually rose to the surface.

It would be an unwarrantable trespass on the reader's patience to follow all the intricacies of this contest, which has lasted nearly three hundred years, or to analyse what each combatant asserted or refuted; and it would be very painful to rake up all the bitterness and obliquity to which it has occasionally given rise. For these reasons I shall endeavour to state, as tersely as I can, the grounds of the final

* See Malou, Recherches, etc., p. 262; also Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., p. 149, 150.

conclusions to which a long course of study has led me.*

To commence, I shall refer to the works of the leading modern Gersenist authors, who doubtless have profited by all the erudition of those who preceded them. These writers are the Chevalier de Grégory, the Père Mella, S.J., Dom Cölestin Wolfsgruber, and Monseigneur Puyol.

The *History of "The Imitation of Christ"* by the Chevalier de Grégory enables us to form an opinion regarding this author.† It is impossible to read his elaborate treatise without arriving at the conclusion that this worthy Vercellese gentleman was imbued with the highest motives and filled with boundless enthusiasm; that he was of transparent simplicity, totally innocent of logic, and gifted with a rare power of confusion.

The earlier part of his life appears to have been spent in searching amongst the manuscripts of *The Imitation* for one to prove the existence and claims of the supposed John Gersen. That he failed to discover such is only too obvious. His powers as a philosophical historian appear to have been peculiarly limited, as we may conclude from some illustrations. He gives a list of authorities, whom he quotes with a view to proving that John Gersen existed.‡ The

* Those who wish to study the history of the Controversy from the beginning will find ample details in the first chapter of Malou's Recherches, etc., pp. 1–73; also in Kettlewell's Authorship, etc., especially in chapters viii.–xi.; and in the *Tablet*, from 1876 to 1884.

† Histoire, etc.

‡ Ibid., vol. ii., p. 14.

majority are unknown, and no reference is given to their works. This is a facile short cut out of the difficulty. We need not spend time discussing the entire list; a few specimens will suffice. One historian referred to is Jean Baptiste Modena. On examination of his works, it appears that what he really said is: "*That if it is proved that a certain John, Abbot of* "*Vercelli, composed 'The Imitation,'* this writer ought to "have belonged to the monastery of St. Stephen, and "not to that of St. Andrew." Is this a proof of the existence of John Gersen?* Wolfsgruber tells us (page 12, note 7) that Modena's manuscript is dated 1617; that is to say, subsequent to the time when Cajetan put forward John Gersen. I need not add that this circumstance takes all weight of independent testimony from the historian in question.

Another authority similarly quoted is Augustine Della Chiesa. This writer does not mention Gersen in his *Catalogue of the Illustrious Men of Vercelli*, published in 1614. It was not until 1648, some years subsequent to Cajetan's last publication, that he enumerates Gersen among the writers of Piedmont. The value of this tardy record may be estimated by the circumstance that Della Chiesa affirms, upon the authority of Cajetan, that the *autograph manuscript of The Imitation of Christ* still existed in the monastery of St. Stephen's at Vercelli, *which, be it remembered, had been demolished long before he wrote!* †

Durandi and Napione, who lived at the end of the

* Malou, Recherches, etc., p. 242. † Ibid., p. 243.

eighteenth and commencement of the present century, are also quoted by De Grégory, but with results as futile as Modena and Della Chiesa. Much is made of an assertion that, according to Napione, Frova *had seen* an ancient parchment which contained the names of the Benedictine Abbots of St. Stephen's at Vercelli, and that upon it was written the name of John Gersen, and the date 1247. Surely, if such were the case, the parchment should be forthcoming.* When we recall the fact that all these authorities, quoted to prove Gersen's existence, lived between three and five hundred years subsequent to his supposed abbacy, and that no satisfactory intervening links have ever been brought forward, we are in a position to estimate their evidence at its real value.

Such are De Grégory's historical proofs of the existence of Gersen. Yet he exclaims, "How, after "the production of so many witnesses, so ancient and "respectable, can one doubt the existence of the monk "John Gersen?"† Verily our author was a man of easy belief!

Of the Chevalier's logic we shall see something by-and-by. When I allude to his marvellous power of confusing his subject, I do not mean to be altogether censorious. In his instance the gift was not without value. To make the most of an indefensible plea, there are two courses open to the advocate. One is

* De Grégory, Histoire, etc., vol. ii., p. 106; also Malou, Recherches, etc., p. 244.

† De Grégory, Histoire, etc., vol. ii., p. 14, note.

to state the case with such boldness and disregard of all opposing arguments that an uninformed audience is fairly taken by storm. Another is to involve the leading facts in confusion by drawing off the attention to side issues in such a manner as to bewilder the unwary. Admirable illustrations of both these methods are to be found among the Gersenist writers. While Mella and Wolfsgruber ably represent the first, De Grégory and Puyol are distinguished exponents of the second.

The later portion of De Grégory's life was devoted to a different, but equally unsuccessful, mode of supporting the cause of Gersen. We shall briefly relate it. In the year 1830 he purchased from Techener, a bookseller in Paris, a manuscript of *The Imitation of Christ*, which was believed to have come from Italy.* No sooner had he possessed himself of this treasure, than he examined it closely, and, being unskilled in paleography, assigned it to the thirteenth century. Without difficulty he found several enthusiasts as credulous as himself, who confirmed him in this belief.†

Inside the volume he discovered the names of its former owners. Beginning with the date of 1550, was a list of various members of a family known by the appellation "Avogadro;" in Latin, "De Advo-"catis." Now, it so happened that a noble family of

* De Grégory, Histoire, etc., vol. ii., p. 223.

† Ibid., p. 229 and following; also Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 285–293.

that name still lived at Biella, near Vercelli. Here was a discovery; or, at all events, a foundation upon which to build a castle in the air! De Grégory lost no time in making known his good fortune, and in communicating with the Avogadro family. Shortly afterwards, most marvellous to relate, a fragment of a diary was exhumed from amongst the archives of the said family, dating between 1345 and 1349, in which a certain Joseph De Advocatis makes allusion to a precious codex of *The Imitation of Christ*, which he avers was in the possession of his ancestors long before the time at which he wrote.*

Led astray by a mass of fantasies, De Grégory now formulated and published his conclusions—

First. That his manuscript, the *Codex De Advocatis*, dated from the thirteenth century.

Secondly. That the diary, thenceforth known as the *Diarium De Advocatis*, referred to that Codex; and

Thirdly. That all this (supposed) evidence favoured the cause of John Gersen.

At first, the real facts being unknown and unsuspected, De Grégory succeeded in making several converts to his views, especially in Italy; but by-and-by inexorable truth penetrated the mists of delusion, and the worthy Chevalier's castle vanished into thin air.

First. Critical examination has proved that the newly discovered manuscript of *The Imitation* really

* De Grégory, Histoire, etc., vol. ii., p. 238.

belonged to the fifteenth, and not the thirteenth, century;* and

Secondly. That the *Diarium* was a clumsy forgery.†

Apart from these extraordinary deceptions, to which the Chevalier undoubtedly fell an innocent victim, it seems strange that any one of his experience should have attempted to erect from such a foundation any support for the pretensions of John Gersen. The *Codex de Advocatis* and the *Diarium* make no mention whatsoever of Gersen, and De Grégory ought to have known that there never was a scintilla of trustworthy evidence to connect that mythical personage with Vercelli.

If, for the sake of argument, we were to concede what we know to be untrue—namely, that the *Codex de Advocatis* dated from the thirteenth century, and that the *Diarium* was a genuine document, De Grégory's defence of Gersen derived from these premisses would resolve itself into the following argument:—

First. The *Codex de Advocatis* dates from the thirteenth century.

Secondly. The *Diarium* alludes to that particular Codex.

Thirdly. Therefore John Gersen was the author!

* Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 285–293; also Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, etc., p. 3.

† Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 285–293; Becker, p. 67; Loth, Revue des Questions Historiques, vol. xxii., 1877, p. 499. M. Loth refers to the suspected forger as "plus hardi même qu'habile." I consider it needless to quote other authorities on this point.

Verily, if this is a specimen of De Grégory's logic, he was not a close reasoner. When, on the other hand, we grasp the real facts—namely, that the *Codex de Advocatis* is a fifteenth-century document, and the *Diarium* a fabrication, then indeed we realize how utterly the estimable Chevalier was himself deceived, and in turn misled those who accepted his opinions. So much for De Grégory. No one can read his works without arriving at the conclusion that what he considers facts are fables, that his conjectures are wild, and his conclusions untenable.

Mella and Wolfsgruber follow a line so similar—in fact, identical—that they differ only in the language in which they write. What may be affirmed of one applies in the main to the other. I have studied both, and, with the assistance of my friend, Mr. Louis Ely O'Carroll, A.B., R.U.I., an accomplished German scholar, have made a digest of Wolfsgruber's essay. It can best be described as a romance, charming reading for any one totally ignorant of the subject, but deficient in any solid basis. Like Mella, he adopts the method of boldly stating his case—very attractively, I admit—and of ignoring or minimizing all that can be brought against it.

First, he gives an imaginary life of the supposed Abbot, including his birthplace, details of his early education, his friendships, his dignities, and of course his works, including *The Imitation of Christ.* For all this, as we know, there is not one particle of foundation. Wolfsgruber's story, like many others, is quite

credible until the other side is heard. Then it crumbles to dust—nay, more, the wonder begins to grow that any one could write as he does, unless satisfied that his assertions could be verified. When the reader seeks for proofs, he discovers that none exist.

Apart from the romantic element already alluded to, Wolfsgruber's work, like Mella's, consists of a *réchauffé* of the usual exploded theories of the Gersenists—namely, the manuscripts supposed to be older than à Kempis,—the famous *Diarium de Advocatis,*—the imagined quotations by writers of the thirteenth century,—the Paulanus codex,—and so on. It may be said of it, that what is new is not true, and what is true is not new.

Probably the best comment I can make upon Wolfsgruber's *Life and Work of John Gersen* is to record its effect upon the learned critic, the late Père Schneemann, S.J., who at the time he studied it inclined to the side of Gersen, and had actually written in his favour. The result of his examination of this essay was to shake his former belief so completely that he investigated the question anew, and became an avowed and ardent Kempist. I shall translate his words :—

"Formerly I defended the rights of Gersen, and "I believed them to be indisputable; I then took in "hand, with the greatest interest, Wolfsgruber's plea "for Gersen, believing that I should find therein "arguments for my own justification. I was then in

"the most favourable dispositions regarding Gersen; "but, after having studied this work profoundly, I "began to doubt, and the rights of Gersen did not "appear to me so certain. The more I examined the "question in all its aspects, the more I felt myself led "to believe that Thomas à Kempis had in reality "written *The Imitation.*"

Subsequently Schneemann contributed a remarkable article in favour of Thomas à Kempis, whom he looks upon as inspired by John Van Schoonhoven, to whose letter I have already alluded.*

Since the publication of his work on John Gersen, Dom Wolfsgruber has edited a pamphlet, entitled, *Septem Motiva contra Thomam de Kempis.*† Monseigneur Puyol quotes this essay, the manuscript of which is to be found in the National Library in Paris.‡ The document is a remarkable specimen of feebleness and confusion, and it is not easy to understand why Wolfsgruber and Puyol avail themselves of it, as it is certainly anti-Gersenist, and a very weak attempt to dispute the claims of the great monk of Mount St. Agnes.

The present appears a suitable occasion to consider some arguments which have been put forth from time to time by the Gersenists, and are revived by Mella and Wolfsgruber, with the idea of showing that *The Imita-*

* See Becker, p. 247.

† Septem Motiva contra Thomam de Kempis, Ed. Cölestinus Wolfsgruber. Vindobonae: Reisser et Werthner, 1882.

‡ See La Doctrine du Livre De Imitatione Christi, p. 470.

tion of Christ existed in the thirteenth century, and that its author was an Italian and a Benedictine.

For example, it is stated that certain authors quoted (?) the work shortly after that period. Amongst those named I may enumerate St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, Petrarch, Pope John XXII., and Dante.

Very naturally it will be asked, "Did these writers "in reality *quote The Imitation?*" Certainly not. We have seen how St. Bonaventure was supposed to have done so owing to the error which attributed to him the *Collationes Tolosanae*, a work which we are now certain was not his, but of far later date.

As regards St. Thomas Aquinas, it is well known that he composed *The Office of the Holy Sacrament* about 1264, at the request of Pope Urban IV. As certain sentences in that work have a strong resemblance to passages in the fourth book of *The Imitation*, it is urged by the Gersenists that he quoted from the latter.

This contention does not bear investigation. *The Office of the Holy Sacrament* is a complete work, and shows no sign of being made up of the writings of others; moreover, if St. Thomas borrowed from *The Imitation*, it is obvious that the latter must have been known in his time. If so, why did not others quote it, and where did it lie hidden from the middle of the thirteenth century until the first third of the fifteenth?

Not alone is there no manuscript in existence to

support this idea, but we are unable to discover the faintest allusion to the book in any one of the numerous spiritual writers who flourished between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. From all these facts it becomes manifest that it was the author of *The Imitation* who borrowed from St. Thomas Aquinas, and not the latter from the former.*

As regards the other authors named, a few disjointed sentences, or fragmentary ideas, are paraded, and vaunted as *quotations*. For example, Dante is asserted to have derived his ideas of the punishment of hell from the twenty-fourth chapter of Book i. This is vague indeed! Is it not more likely that the author of *The Imitation* drew his picture from Dante, or, rather, that both he and Dante were inspired by the Apocalypse?†

Another argument which has been put forward to show that *The Imitation* dates from the thirteenth century is founded on the following passage, which occurs in the fourth chapter of Book iv. :—"Wherefore "if I cannot draw out of the fulness of the fountain "nor drink my fill, I will at least set my mouth to the "orifice of this heavenly pipe, that so I may draw "thence some small drop to refresh my thirst, to the "end that I wither not wholly away." It has been suggested that this allusion to the "heavenly pipe"

* See Amort, Deductio Critica, p. 59; also Loth, Article 2, Revue des Questions Historiques, pp. 99–103. 1874.

† This chapter contains twenty-seven Scriptural allusions, of which three are to the Apocalypse.

refers to the tube through which it was the custom for the laity to receive the Precious Blood when the Holy Communion was administered under both species. As this custom is asserted to have ceased before the fourteenth century, it is argued that the book must have been written earlier than that period. This plea is wholly invalid. In the first place, the phrase is manifestly figurative, and moreover the discipline of the Church varied in different countries and times on this point. We know, however, that it was not until the Council of Constance (A.D. 1414–1418) that the prohibition against the administration of the Holy Communion under both species was made universal in the Western Church.*

Let us examine another argument by which an effort is made to show that *The Imitation* belongs to the thirteenth century. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Book i. we read the following praises of the Carthusians and Cistercians :—

"How do many other religious, who live under "strict monastic discipline ?

"They seldom go abroad, they live retired, their "diet is very poor, their habit coarse, they labour much, "they speak little, they watch long, they rise early, "they spend much time in prayer, they read often, and "keep themselves in all discipline.

"Consider the Carthusians, the Cistercians, and the "monks and nuns of divers Orders ; how every night "they rise to sing psalms to the Lord."

* Catholic Dictionary, Addis and Arnold, p. 201.

It is alleged by the Gersenists that no author of the fifteenth century would have written thus, because the Carthusians and Cistercians at that time had fallen away considerably from the fervour of previous centuries. This assertion is wholly gratuitous. It will be sufficient for my purpose to show that Thomas à Kempis held a diametrically opposite opinion. Let us turn to his *Life of Gerard Groot*, chap. iv., par. i., wherein he deplores the laxity of the clergy and laity, and then speaks of the Carthusians in the following words:— "Apud Carthusienses vero, lux vitae coelestis remansit "occulta, et carnalibus videbatur satis austera, erat "tamen Deo gratissima, et spiritu ferventibus optabilis "atque jucunda."

Again, it has been affirmed that the author of *The Imitation* must have been an Italian because he uses several words with Italian terminations. As illustrations I may mention *regratiari*, *pensare*, *querulando*, *sentimenta*, etc. This argument, specious at first sight, vanishes upon investigation. Such Italianized words, as we have seen, were habitually used by à Kempis and the Windesheimers. Amort * quotes about sixty instances in which à Kempis *in his other works* uses the same Italianized words as we find in *The Imitation*, and also ten more instances in which Busch does the same in the *Chronicle of Windesheim*. Bonet-Maury throws a light upon this peculiarity of the Latinity of the Windesheimers. At the commencement of the

* Amort, Deductio Critica, pp. 62–64; also Malou, Recherches, etc., p. 280.

second chapter of his work on Gerard Groot, from which I have already quoted, he alludes to the position of Deventer, where we know that Thomas à Kempis and most of his companions were educated. Situated on the Yssel, in the direct line of commerce between Italy and the north of Europe, it was most natural that its inhabitants should acquire many Italian words and phrases in their dealings with the Southerns. Be this as it may, the plea of Italianized words avails nothing against à Kempis, since we know that it was his habit to use them.

Again, to prove an Italian origin of *The Imitation*, the following words are quoted from the fifth chapter of Book iv. :—

"A priest clad in his sacred vestments holds the "place of Christ, to pray to God for himself and for "all the people in a suppliant and humble manner.

"He bears before and behind the sign of his "Lord's Cross, that he may always remember the "passion of Christ," etc.

From this text the Gersenists argue that the book must have come from Italy, because, as they assert, the Italian chasuble of the Middle Ages had a cross both in front and behind. The truth of this assertion is more than doubtful. Exhaustive research has been made on the point, with the result of showing that, while no fixed custom existed, the two crosses were most commonly adopted in Belgium. From this we have reason to assume that such also was the case in Holland. So far as this argument

goes, it makes in favour of à Kempis and against Gersen.*

Great pains have been taken to discover in *The Imitation* a spirit traceable to a Benedictine source. Just now, when considering Monseigneur Puyol's work, I shall revert to this point.

Leaving De Grégory, Mella, and Wolfsgruber, we come to the most recent defender of the Gersenist theory—namely, Monseigneur Puyol. This erudite writer approaches the subject in a more scholarly fashion than his predecessors, discusses its points with ingenuity and at prodigious length, and requires a somewhat fuller notice, even though his arguments are shallow and his conclusions untenable. Assuming that this learned divine, in his elaborate treatise on *The Imitation of Christ*,† has availed himself of all the learning that has ever been brought forward in favour of Gersen, I have read and re-read with close attention his ponderous octavo of five hundred and thirty pages. If not luminous, Puyol is certainly voluminous. While respectfully acknowledging the erudition shown by him, and in some points admiring his elaborate, though strangely complicated, analysis of *The Imitation*, I am obliged to add that I cannot find in anything or in all that he brings forward the smallest ground for accepting his opinions concerning its authorship.

* See Malou, Recherches, etc., pp. 275–279; also Notes, Matériaux, et Recherches sur l'Auteur du Livre de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, par Thomas Brunton, p. 39. Paris: Plon et Cie, 1873; also Loth, Revue des Questions Historiques, vol. xv., pp. 134–5. Paris: 1874.

† La Doctrine du Livre De Imitatione Christi, etc.

These opinions, in brief, amount to this—

First. *That the so-called John Gersen wrote "The "Imitation of Christ;"* and

Secondly. *That Thomas à Kempis could not have been its author.*

Puyol's work is by no means an easy one to master, both on account of its dimension and also from the prolixity and confusion of its style. It would not be possible, in this short essay, to review it page by page, or to enter upon the refutation of its numberless errors, which are perfectly obvious to any one who has studied the controversy; but I shall endeavour to point out a few specimens of its main fallacies.

At page 369 we find a *résumé* of Puyol's conclusions respecting the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ.* I quote them in his own words—

"1. L'auteur était moine Bénédictin.

"2. Il se nommait Jean Gersen.

"3. Il vivait pendant la première moitié du treiz-"ième siècle.

"4. Il a été probablement abbé. Nous disons "probablement, car le manuscrit d'Arone est le seul "qui lui attribue cette dignité.

"5. Tout porte à croire qu'il était Italien.

"6. Il y a quelque indice que Jean Gersen a vécu "dans un monastère, sinon de Verceil, du moins des "environs de Verceil."

Let us now examine these six propositions :—

"1. *L'auteur était moine Bénédictin.*"

Upon what foundation, may we ask, does Puyol

make this announcement? Evidently upon grounds which are not satisfactory even to himself. Let us open page 66 of his work, where he discusses what he terms the "Bénédictinisme" of *The Imitation of Christ*.

Here the learned Monseigneur, with exemplary candour, avows that this character is by no means clear, and writes as follows:—"L'auteur de *l'Imitation* "n'indique nulle part, d'une manière expresse, l'ordre "auquel il a appartenu. Il est nécessaire de recourir "à des inductions." Following up these "inductions," he discusses, at page 69, the religious terminology of *The Imitation*, and, while quoting many words which exist both in it and the *Regula* of St. Benedict, he admits that there are several others which are not to be found in the *Regula*.

Next, at page 73, our author considers the question of the alleged similarity in spirit and expression between *The Imitation of Christ* and the *Regula* of St. Benedict. This question has been treated at great length by certain Gersenists—Valgrave, Quatremaire, and others; also by the Chevalier de Grégory in his edition of *The Imitation*.* Manifestly Puyol is not at all satisfied on this point. At page 78 he writes as follows:—"Malgré tout, convenons-en, le Bénédic- "tinisme de l'auteur de *l'Imitation* ne se manifeste pas "d'une manière absolument incontestable. Les rapports "du pieux livre et de la *Régle* de St. Benoit ne sont "pas tels qu'il ne puisse y avoir aucun doute."

* De Imitatione Christi, etc., curante Equite G. De Grégory. Parisiis: Didot, 1833.

This is a mild evasion of the reality. A learned friend of mine, profoundly versed in the *Regula* of St. Benedict, lately read over *The Imitation* studiously with the special object of finding whether a close similarity was traceable between the two. The result was negative. I have myself endeavoured to do the same, and with the result of discovering very striking differences. It seems to me that no one can study the *Regula* of St. Benedict* side by side with *The Imitation of Christ* without perceiving a marked contrast in many very important points.

It is impossible to read this portion of Puyol's work attentively without concluding, *upon his own showing*, that the author of *The Imitation* derived his doctrine from others besides St. Benedict. All this bears forcibly upon the question of the authorship, proving that it was not purely Benedictine, but leavened by another school. My own researches, as well as those of others far better informed, lead to the belief that the teaching of the Congregation of Windesheim constituted that extra-Benedictine element; because, while it partook of much that was Benedictine, through the influence of St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, St. Anselm, and others, it was also permeated by the doctrines of St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure, St. Francis of Assisium, and St. Thomas of Aquin, whose works were in their hands, giving it a wider inspiration and a more copious

* Regula Sancti Patris Benedicti, secundum editionem Congregationis Cassinensis. Einsidlae: Benziger, 1877; also New Translation. London: Burns and Oates, 1886.

terminology, and rendering it, in fact, like *The Imitation* itself, partly Benedictine and partly extra-Benedictine. That the School of Windesheim was strongly Benedictine we know from Busch and Thomas à Kempis. The former says, in his work *On the Reformation of the Monasteries*, "Omnia pene quae nos "habemus, in regula continentur S. Benedicti;" and à Kempis, in his *Vita Boni Monachi*, chapter vi., adds, "Imitare Sanctum Benedictum; Serva omne verbum "tibi dictum." Furthermore, if we reflect on the various elements which entered into the spirituality of the "Circle of Windesheim," we have no difficulty in understanding its breadth of character. Gerard Groot was a disciple of the Carthusian de Kalcar. Besides the works of the Fathers, which he tells us were his chosen riches on earth, he alludes in terms of warm commendation to the *Horologium Aeternae Sapientiae* of Suso.* Schoonhoven drew largely from John Tambaco, and doubtless was influenced by his own Prior, the mystical John Ruysbroeck. The Canons Regular necessarily derived much from St. Augustine, including his maxim, "Ama nesciri." The practical tendency of the religious revival in Holland was also present; and, above and beyond all, the Scriptural tone so manifest in the works emanating from the

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. lii. The "Preparation "for Death," to which Groot alludes here, will be found at p. 236 of the French translation of Goerrès' edition, and at p. 209 of that by Cartier. See Bibliography, Suso. Very probably it was through Groot that Vos van Huesden acquired his appreciation of Suso, which is recorded by Busch, Chronicle of Windesheim, book i., chap. xli.

Windesheimers, gave to their teaching an individuality which explains its difference from that of other schools.

The conclusion to which I am led by reading Puyol's treatise is that he himself is more than doubtful of the purely Benedictine origin of *The Imitation;* and the study of other works—especially Busch, à Kempis, Amort, Eustathius,* Fronteau,† Spitzen,‡ and Becker, satisfies me that it is not to the great Order of St. Benedict, but to the "Circle of Windesheim," that we must look for the inspiration of the book. There, and there only, can we find its spirit and doctrine clearly outlined, as though it were the "rapiarium," or handbook, of that Congregation.

It seems, then, quite evident that we cannot accept Puyol's first proposition—viz. "*L'auteur était moine "Bénédictin.*"

The Monseigneur's second proposition concerning the author of *The Imitation* is—

"2. *Il se nommait Jean Gersen.*"

Here it is only needful to refer the reader to the already described origin of John Gersen, and to repeat that his existence is unproven, and that he is still a myth.

Our author's third and fourth propositions are as follows :—

"3. *Il vivait pendant la première moitié du treizième "siècle.*

* Argumenta, etc., Theophili Eustathii et Joannis Frontonis. Parisiis : S. et G. Cramoisy, 1651.

† Ibid. ‡ Nouvelle Défense, etc.

"4. *Il a été probablement abbé. Nous disons probable-*
"*ment, car le manuscrit d'Arone est le seul qui lui*
"*attribue cette dignité.*"

These assertions have already been discounted and shown to be utterly unfounded.

Puyol's fifth proposition is—

"5. *Tout porte à croire qu'il était Italien.*"

As a matter of fact, we know already that the overwhelming evidence which exists goes to show that the author was a Dutchman, and a member of the Congregation of Windesheim.

Our author's sixth and last proposition is—

"6. *Il y a quelque indice que Jean Gersen a vécu*
"*dans un monastère, sinon de Verceil, du moins des*
"*environs de Verceil.*"

Our reply to this must be that as yet there is no evidence whatsoever that John Gersen ever lived at all, and that his supposed connection with Vercelli is based upon a memorandum written in a printed edition of *The Imitation of Christ*, admitted to have been falsified, and hence utterly worthless.

After the foregoing six propositions, Monseigneur Puyol adds the following remark:—"En dehors de "ces données, l'étude de *l'Imitation* ne présente, nous "allons le voir dans les pages suivantes, que confusion, "contradiction et impossibilité." I have read and re-read "les pages suivantes" referred to, and crave permission to rejoin that I see nothing but confusion, contradiction, and impossibility in attempting to attribute the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* to a being

whose existence is unproven, improbable, and wholly mythical; and, on the other hand, I find the utmost satisfaction in assigning it to Thomas à Kempis, in whose favour we have a substantial mass of evidence—traditional, contemporary, external, and internal. The utterly baseless pleas put forward with so much ingenuity by the Gersenists, and especially by Puyol, leave the so-called Abbot of Vercelli in the limbo from which they vainly strive to extricate him, and only serve to accentuate the undeniable arguments in favour of the great Monk of Mount St. Agnes.

We shall now consider Monseigneur Puyol's second conclusion touching the paternity of *The Imitation*—namely, *That Thomas à Kempis could not have been its author.*

Obviously the mere raising of this plea is a confession of the weakness of the cause of Gersen. If it could be shown that the latter existed and wrote the book, no allusion to Thomas à Kempis would be needful. Failing to make a case for the mythical candidate, Puyol's next effort is to dispossess the Monk of Agnetenberg. How far he succeeds remains to be seen. In this portion of his treatise (book iv.) our author dwells much upon a certain thesis which emanated from the Benedictines of St. Germain-des-Prés about the end of the seventeenth century, and is now brought to light for the first time. The original manuscript, written out and annotated by Dom Mabillon, is in the National Library in Paris. Why this document lay hidden so long appears strange if its

authors placed any confidence in it, but is intelligible enough on the opposite hypothesis. This exhumation of still-born essays is a new feature in the controversy. We have already alluded to a similar achievement by Dom Wolfsgruber. It seems equally clear that Monseigneur Puyol's discovery cannot serve the cause of Gersen, or injure that of Thomas à Kempis. The document is a collection of complicated arguments founded on baseless theories and unproven statements, put forward with as much gravity and confidence as if they were undeniable truths. It would be impossible to discuss all these fallacies. I shall mention but a few specimens.

One line of argument taken is to quote certain manuscripts—for example, the Mantua or Padolironus, the Slusio, Arona, and others, as being of such ancient date that Thomas à Kempis could not have been the writer of the original. If this could be proved, then indeed the claims of the Monk of Agnetenberg would be at an end; but the reader is in a position to judge this plea, knowing that it has been demonstrated over and over that not a single manuscript of *The Imitation* exists, dated or undated, which can be assigned to a period earlier than the middle age of Thomas à Kempis.

At page 488, Monseigneur Puyol re-opens the worn-out controversy touching the evidence of John Busch, who, as we have seen, definitely states that Thomas à Kempis composed *The Imitation of Christ*. This seems an unwise course, because it necessitates

the discussion of much that might well be left in oblivion. The responsibility, however, is not mine.

When the Gersenists put forward their mythical candidate, obviously one indispensable step was to silence, if possible, the contemporary witnesses who bore testimony in favour of à Kempis. Of these the most formidable was John Busch. His statement, coming from a man of such unimpeachable character and intimate knowlege of the facts, placed the claims of Thomas à Kempis beyond rational controversy, and hence the only course open to those who opposed them was to repudiate altogether the evidence of the Chronicler of Windesheim.

The method at first adopted by the Gersenists was to assert that the words "videlicet, qui sequitur me, *De "Imitatione Christi,"* were not written by Busch, but interpolated into his manuscript. This assertion was made with the utmost *sang-froid*, but, so far as I can ascertain, without any solid justification for so grave a charge.

What are the facts?

Busch wrote two *Chronicles of Windesheim*, the first in 1458, the second, which was completed six years later, in 1464. The later edition differed considerably from the earlier, being much amplified, especially in the matter of personal details. In the first edition Thomas à Kempis is not mentioned at all; in the second he is named in connection with the dream which preceded the death of Vos van Huesden. There he is stated unequivocally to have been the author of *The Imitation of Christ.*

It would seem to have been customary with Busch to write in the foregoing manner. According to Grube, who has lately brought out his two great works, Busch likewise wrote two editions of his *Liber de Reformatione Monasteriorum*, an earlier setting, and a later one more amplified.

It is not difficult to understand that confusion between these two editions of the *Chronicle* of Busch, the earlier without, and the later with, the disputed words, gave an excellent opportunity to the Gersenists, whose object was to discredit à Kempis in order to make way for their candidate. Naturally the Augustinians repudiated the grievous charge of interpolation, and at their instance a Congress was held in Paris in 1681, for the purpose of examining the MSS. which vouched for Thomas à Kempis. As the *Procès Verbal* was not published at the time, very erroneous impressions were circulated concerning the result. It was only in 1880 that these minutes were made public.*

These false impressions were intensified and perpetuated by words which appear in the *Ouvrages Posthumes* of Mabillon,† which certainly were very misleading, although, when viewed by the light of recent investigation, I believe were written in good faith.

The first volume of the work named commences with a history of the controversy about the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, by the editor, Dom Thuil-

* Santini, 2nda parte, pp. 215–228.

† Ouvrages Posthumes de D. Jean Mabillon, etc., par D. Vincent Thuillier. Paris : F. Babuty et J. F. Josse. 1724.

lier, and at page 45 we find the words which I shall now quote, alluding to the Augustinians and the Congress of 1681—"Ils produisirent aussi deux "Chroniques de Jean Busch, dans l'une desquelles, qui "paroissoit originale, n'étoit pas la parenthèse soup- "çonnée de faux par les premiers défenseurs de Gersen, "mais seulement dans la seconde, qu'ils prétendirent "avoir été augmentée par Buzilius (Busch ?) même. "D. Mabillon avoit appris ces particularitez de Mr. du "Cange et de Mr. Buluze, qui étoient des Examina- "teurs. Car le Procès Verbal ne fut pas imprimé."

Any one reading this extract, and the others given by Puyol in the note at page 495, might easily fall into the erroneous belief that when reference is made to two *Chronicles* of Busch two MSS. of *the same work* were in question, one without and another containing the disputed words. This idea, coupled with the words applied to the earlier *Chronicle*, "qui paroissoit "originale," and those used in reference to the later edition, "qu'ils prétendirent avoir été augmentée par "Busch même," would naturally give rise to the suspicion that the MS. termed "originale" was the autograph of Busch, and that the other, which contained the contested sentence, was a copy. From such premisses it only needed the will to construct a defence for the suggestion of Dom Valgrave that some one had interpolated the said words into the copy.

Now, as a matter of fact, we have reason to believe that no autograph of Busch was produced at the Congress of 1681. If such had existed it would have been

at St. Martin's at Louvain, where the documents from Windesheim were brought when that Institution was broken up, but we have no evidence whatsoever that an autograph was to be found among the documents sent from there to Paris. Probably the autographs of Busch were lost when the convents were sacked during the riots of the Reformation. Copies of the two *Chronicles* were produced, one of the earlier edition without the contested words, and two of the later edition, both of which contained them. So far as we at present know only one copy of the earlier *Chronicle* exists, namely, that at Gaesdonck, but several copies of the later edition are extant, every one of which contains the disputed sentence.

The erudite Ellies du Pin, although a decided anti-Kempist, was far more cautious in alluding to the Codex without the contested words than Dom Mabillon's editor. Evidently he, too, had not seen it, and depended solely upon rumour.*

Within the last few months a new light has been thrown upon this subject, which appears to clear up all obscurity. A couple of years ago the learned savant, Fr. Victor Becker, S.J., whose work on *The Imitation and the Netherland Documents* has been so frequently quoted by me, heard of a MS. of the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, belonging to the Seminary of Gaesdonck, a small town in Prussia, near to the borders of Holland.

* See page lxviii. of his Dissertation on the Authorship of The Imitation, in vol. i. of his edition of the Works of John Charlier de Gerson.

With some difficulty he obtained permission, not alone to see it, but also to bring it to his own Convent at Oudenbosch, for the purpose of examining it critically. The result of this investigation is that this MS. (which was transcribed in 1493 at the Convent of St. Catharine, near Nymegen), proves to be a copy of the earlier edition of Busch's *Chronicle*, dating 1458, and differing in many points from the later edition of 1464. *In it Thomas à Kempis is not mentioned at all*, and consequently the omission of the words attributing to him the authorship of *The Imitation* is not alone explained, but it becomes evident that they could not possibly have existed in it. Fr. Becker has published an account of his recent discovery,* which he has reprinted, adding selections from the Gaesdonck MS. in order to show how materially it differs from the *Chronicle* of 1464.

With all this information before us, we are enabled to understand the origin and baselessness of the charge of interpolation made by the Gersenists against the Augustinians, and also to see that the words in Mabillon's posthumous works, founded, be it remembered, on the verbal evidence of Du Cange and Baluze, gave countenance to that suggestion, all the while that they in nowise formulated such an accusation, or, we may believe, were written with such an intention.

The introduction of the contested evidence into the later edition of the *Chronicle* appears perfectly natural.

* Overgedrukt uit de Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap, gevestigd te Utrecht. 10e Deel.

This edition is fuller in personal details than the preceding one; and once Thomas' name was mentioned, it was in harmony with Busch's custom to cite his works. Moreover, the *Chronicle* was an historical work, and doubtless was perfected as time went on. Nay, more, while it may have been discreet to guard Thomas' incognito at first about a matter probably well known to his Order, later, when the names of St. Bernard and Gerson were mooted in connection with *The Imitation*, it became a duty to tell the truth by pointing out the real author.

As regards the copies of the later edition of Busch's *Chronicle*, dated 1464, we find several extant. I shall particularize a few, for reasons which will soon appear.

The earliest copy is that transcribed by John Gherardyn. The portion containing the words alluding to Thomas à Kempis (De Viris illustribus) is dated 1465; that is, one year subsequent to Busch's autograph. The rest is dated 1466. The Pastoor Spitzen, at Plate VI. of his work *Thomas à Kempis als Schrijver*, etc., gives a facsimile of the passage, as it may be seen in the Library of the University of Utrecht. A glance shows the absurdity of suggesting interpolation, as there is no space for it; and if the disputed sentence were removed, the text loses meaning and sequence, the words "cúm aliis" following "composuit," and the monosyllable "cum" being the *only* word in one line!

Another copy, which comes from the monastery of Rebdorff, dated 1477, contains them.*

* Becker, pp. 20, 21.

Another copy, from the Convent of Everardsclausen, dated 1478, and examined by Mooren, also contains them.*

Now, let us remember, Busch died in 1479; therefore, apart from his autograph, which doubtless existed at Windesheim, we find no less than three copies made during the author's life, all necessarily well known to the members of his Order, and all declaring Thomas à Kempis to be the author of *The Imitation of Christ.*

Such evidence is sufficient for reasonable men. In addition, let us bear in mind that Busch's autograph and Gherardyn's copy were extant *during the lifetime of à Kempis himself.*

There are other MSS. of the *Chronicle*, some of great antiquity, which also contain the words in question; for example, those in the Library of the Bollandists in Brussels; in the Royal Library of the Hague; Riddere's copy in the Burgundian Library at Brussels; and also a Codex which belonged to St. Martin's, at Louvain, and recently was in the possession of the late Mr. Edmund Waterton. In fine, we find the contested words in every copy of the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, except the Gaesdonck Codex; and, as we now know, they could not have been introduced into it, as Thomas is not named at all in that edition. Thus the charge of interpolation has utterly fallen to the ground.

It has been asserted that in some copies the disputed words were included in a parenthesis by brackets. This statement is denied by Becker, the most industrious

* Becker, pp. 20, 21.

investigator of these MSS. ; but even if such were the case, nothing could be argued or deduced from thence, as the sense would not be altered in the slightest degree.

It needs little penetration to see that the object of the Gersenists throughout their special pleadings is to represent that à Kempis was not stated by Busch to be the author of *The Imitation* until after his death. In this they have totally failed.

If we were disposed to pleasantry, this would be the time to ask them the value of their contention if applied to their candidate, whose very name was not heard of for just four hundred years after the asserted date of his supposed existence!

Beaten out of the field on the question of interpolation, and utterly driven to bay, the Gersenists finally took the preposterous step of suggesting that Busch was *mistaken* in attributing the *Imitatio Christi* to Thomas à Kempis! Certainly they, many of whom were members of a religious Order, should have known that even if Busch made a mistake it would have been discovered by his Superiors, whose duty it was, according to the rule of all communities, to read over, correct, and verify their Chronicles. Furthermore, taking a purely human view of the matter, and putting aside the improbability of eminently holy men like the Superiors of Windesheim lending themselves to a falsehood, would they have ventured, in the face of a hostile world, to send forth in their records a statement admitting of contradiction? The very idea defies common sense.

In addition, let us bear in mind that the evidence given in the *Chronicle of Windesheim*, and circulated in numerous copies, was never called in question until Dom Cajetan invented Gersen, about one hundred and fifty years after Busch wrote.

Let me add now a few words as to the position of Thomas à Kempis himself with reference to this testimony.

The autograph of Busch and the copy by Gherardyn appeared respectively seven and five years before à Kempis' death. It is against all human probability that the latter had not seen this elaborate history of his own Order, the property of the Mother House, which was situated a short walk from Mount St. Agnes, but most certainly we have not the faintest evidence that either he or any of his holy companions ever denied his authorship of *The Imitation*, and thus he appears to have given consent by silence.*

So much for the important evidence of John Busch. I have treated it at some length, but unavoidably so to do it even scant justice. I trust that the foregoing summary, which can be verified by the references given, may suffice to convince reasonable people that it is unassailable, entirely worthy of acceptance, and conclusive. Finally, may I suggest that if the advocates of Thomas à Kempis were to make a present of Busch's evidence to the Gersenists, the proofs which still remain in favour of the holy Monk of Agnetenberg

* In corroboration of this important point, I advise the reader to consult Becker's remarks upon it, pp. 26-32, of his essay of 1882.

would amply suffice to carry him triumphant over all his opponents.

Returning to Monseigneur Puyol, we find that he devotes chapter vi. (book iv.) to an effort to prove that *The Imitation* is essentially an outcome of the spiritual school of Italy in the thirteenth century. The more we study this idea, the more visionary it becomes, until it finally vanishes and we are thrown back upon the undeniable fact that the inspiration of the book, its phraseology, and idioms, can only be found in the teaching of the "Circle of Windesheim."

Recognizing the inexplicable difficulty of *The Imitation* having been composed, as he and other Gersenists argue, in the first half of the thirteenth century or thereabouts, and remaining unheard of for two hundred years, Puyol propounds a theory. He tells us that the book was written about the time when scholasticism invaded spiritual literature, and that hence it soon failed to suit those times, and was cast aside and forgotten. Any one who wishes to study the grounds upon which he rests this extraordinary hypothesis will find them stated fully at page 429 of his treatise. His reasoning appears to me eminently unsatisfactory, and such as could not mislead even a child. I shall not be so uncomplimentary to my readers as to ask them to believe that *The Imitation* could have failed to hold its place, in any age or time, as the most beautiful exposition of the highest Christian philosophy that ever issued from the hand of man.

In chapter vii. (book iv.) Puyol discusses the

candidature of John Charlier de Gerson, and takes occasion again to refer *The Imitation* to the commencement of the thirteenth century, pleading especially its non-scholastic style. This argument might suit to displace a scholastic writer like the great Chancellor, but our author seems to forget that the teaching of the School of Windesheim, of which à Kempis was the prominent exponent, was absolutely non-scholastic in character. Every one who has studied it is perfectly aware of this, and Altmeyer, to whose work I have already referred, clearly establishes this fact.*

Puyol devotes chapter ix. (book iv.) to the consideration of Thomas à Kempis—his life, his authentic works, and his style. I regret I cannot speak flatteringly of this portion of the work, which is a laboured effort to depreciate the writings of the Windesheimers, and of the holy Canon of Agnetenberg in particular. The interests of justice oblige me to reproduce the words used by Monseigneur Puyol, which I do with regret and pain :—"Lorsque nous ouvrons les oeuvres "de l'école de Deventer, une chose nous frappe; c'est "la vulgarité du ton. Ce n'est plus la même race de "moines. Le clerc de la vie commune, le Chanoine "Régulier de Windeshem est un religieux rigide, "dévoué à l'oeuvre de sa sanctification, désintéressé, "âpre au labeur; mais il n'a pas les qualités aristo-"cratiques. Il a conservé la rudesse du travailleur "qui a passé de longues années à construire son couvent "de ses propres mains, la banalité du copiste qui est

* Les Précurseurs de la Réforme, etc., chaps. iii., iv.

"obligé de se procurer à chaque instant les ressources "nécessaires au couvent. Le dirai-je? La congré- "gation de Windeshem me représente l'une de ces "associations religieuses de l'Eglise moderne, recrutées "dans la classe populaire, où règne une si grande inten- "sité de vie et une si ardente piété, mais qui n'a pu telle- "ment faire oublier à ses membres leur première "origine, qu'ils en conservent toujours quelque aspect "abrupt et quelque insuffisance de manières.

"Aussi le caractère du style de Thomas Kempis et "de ses confrères dénote-t-il surtout une bonhommie "lourde et vulgaire."

Such are the terms in which our author speaks of à Kempis and his saintly companions! In truth, it is a poor argument to abuse an adversary, and one which invariably denotes a bad cause. We have seen something of à Kempis' life and of the Windesheimers, and are able to estimate this plea at its worth.

When entering upon a comparison between *The Imitation of Christ* and the other treatises which have come down to us as the accredited works of à Kempis, Monseigneur Puyol takes a very convenient course to favour his own particular opinions. He divides all into two classes, the first of which he admits to have some merit, while he very respectfully terms the rest "bagage intellectuel"! He rejects the first as not being attributable to à Kempis, and only admits the others, as it were, to depreciate him.

Puyol's reasoning upon this subject is purely arbitrary, and evidently framed to suit his theory.

As a matter of fact we have as good reason to believe that the works he rejects were written by Thomas as those which he is pleased to admit as his compositions. Respecting their merit in contrast with *The Imitation*, we have already seen that unimpeachable judges deem many of them to be quite comparable with the latter, and strongly resembling it. Puyol's contention that the existence of some of these works in the Codex Girardimontensis displaces à Kempis (chronologically) is wholly baseless,* because neither that manuscript, nor any other which the Gersenists have as yet produced, dated or undated, proves on investigation to be earlier than Thomas' middle age. †

Monseigneur Puyol is very unfortunate in the attempt he makes to contrast *The Imitation* with the other works of à Kempis, to the disadvantage of the latter, especially so when he selects in illustration the beautiful passage in the twenty-fifth chapter of the first book, wherein is described the rescue of a soul from doubt by an act of faith.

Let me recall the incident:—"When one who often "anxiously wavered between hope and fear was one "day consumed with sadness, he prostrated himself in "prayer in the church before a certain altar, and "revolved those things within himself, saying, 'Oh, if "'I did but know that I should persevere on and on!' "All at once he heard within himself the divine

* See Santini, 2nda parte, p. 247.

† M. Ruelens, a very experienced judge, refers this MS. to *about* 1480.

"answer: 'And what wouldst thou do if thou knewest "'this? Do now what thou wouldst then do, and thou "'wilt be safe enough.'

"And presently, being comforted and strengthened, "he committed himself to the divine will, and his "anxious wavering ceased.

"Neither had he a mind to search curiously to "know what should befall him hereafter, but he studied "rather what was the acceptable and perfect will of "God for the beginning and accomplishing of every "good work."

Puyol (p. 480) implies that such a narration surpasses the comprehension of Thomas à Kempis. Does he, may I ask, forget that in the twenty-seventh Sermon to the Novices, example the fourth, Thomas relates, in very similar words, a like rescue from temptation by faith and prayer, *adding that the subject thereof was a certain Brother of Mount St. Agnes?*

Finally, Puyol releases us from all uncertainty as to the bias of his mind when he writes of à Kempis in the following words (p. 486):—"De tous les écrivains "à qui l'on attribue le pieux livre, Thomas Kempis "nous semble le moins capable d'en revendiquer la "paternité. Alors même que *L'Imitation* serait née "au quinzième siècle, elle ne pourrait provenir d'un si "méchant auteur."

When Puyol calls à Kempis "*un si méchant "auteur*," he seems to reckon little that his words defy the common consent of spiritual writers and judges, who for centuries have treasured the works he vainly

strives to disparage; which have passed through some twenty editions, and have been translated into the principal languages of the civilized world.

Monseigneur Puyol has a full right to his opinions, but they are not shared by those who know the works of which he speaks so contemptuously. The learned and holy Pierre Coustou, Vicar-General of Montpellier, one of the most enlightened divines of our century, has given us a beautiful translation of a portion of à Kempis' *Sermons to the Novices*. Let us see in what terms he speaks of them :—"A la première lecture "que je fis de ces sermons, je fus pénétré d'un senti- "ment de respect et d'admiration ; je retrouvai dans ces "sermons l'esprit d'onction et de sainteté de l'inimitable "livre de *L'Imitation de Jésus Christ*, . . . ; tout, dans "les oeuvres d' à Kempis respire les sentiments d'une "piété tendre, profonde, suave, aimable, et son style "est d'une simplicité pleine de charmes et d'onction, "sans être dénuée de force et de lumière : c'est la plus "touchante imitation du langage de Jésus Christ lui- "même.

* * * * * *

"J'ai lu et relu souvent et avec délices les oeuvres "de Thomas à Kempis. Quel homme ! Qu'il est "différent des autres hommes ! entre maints autres "opuscules, il nous a laissé trente discours adressés par "lui aux religieux novices dont il était le maître. "Quelle éloquence ! Elle coule avec une limpidité qui "contraste singulièrement avec l'éloquence de nos jours, "éloquence toute humaine sur laquelle nous avons en-

"semble plus d'une fois gémi. C'est absolument le "livre admirable et presque divin de *l'Imitation de* "*Jésus Christ* (et, par parenthèse, je ne conçois pas "qu'on puisse former des doutes sur l'Auteur de ce "livre, le plus beau de tous, quand on a lu les ouvrages "d' à Kempis)." *

Quite recently Monseigneur Puyol has brought out a magnificent edition of *The Imitation of Christ*, adopting the text of the *Arona Codex*, and, oddly enough, omitting the name of his favoured Gersen from the title page. In his preface he strives to explain the copyists' errors concerning the name of the supposed author. To any one who has closely examined the *Arona* manuscript,† his version of the matter is utterly unsatisfactory. His edition is full of inaccuracies in the Scriptural references, which we may hope to see rectified in a second issue.‡

I have no doubt the reader has already heard sufficient of the mythical John Gersen and his most recent advocates—De Grégory, Mella, Wolfsgruber, and Puyol. I leave them without regret, but cannot refrain from making a few comments on the Controversy. Most assuredly it is a strange one, and not without a painful and inexplicable aspect. While the solid claims of Thomas à Kempis to the authorship

* Sermons de Thomas à Kempis, traduits du Latin, par M. Pierre F. X. Coustou, pp. 5, 6, et 9. Montpellier: Félix Seguin, 1853.

† I enjoyed this privilege in the month of March, 1885, when the codex was for the time in the Bibliotheca Cassanatense in Rome.

‡ De Imitatione Christi, edidit Petrus Eduardus Puyol, Praelatus Domesticus, etc. Lutetiae Parisiorum: Retaux-Bray, 1886.

of *The Imitation of Christ* are transparent to every one who takes the trouble to investigate them, nevertheless we find Gersen, whose existence is wholly unproven and highly improbable, gravely thrust forward and asserted to be the real author. Each and every step in the process of attempting to propound this myth has over and over been proved a delusion. His existence, his dignities, his life, his supposed works, his connection with Vercelli, and his portrait, have all been demonstrated to be the outcome of ambitious dreams. If, in place of finding the clear evidence which exists in favour of Thomas à Kempis, the book of *The Imitation* was manifestly of unknown origin, it would be possible to admit as justifiable the inventing of a theory in favour of an imaginary author like Gersen; but how such a visionary being can be seriously advanced with a view of deposing à Kempis, constitutes an ethical problem which defies solution. At all events, the attempt has proved a complete failure. After prolonged study of all the Gersenist works, ancient and modern, to which I could obtain access at home or abroad, I am led to the conclusion that they are romances and not history, replete with fables, but not facts; and that all the ability and ingenuity of their authors, including the great Dom Mabillon, are simply valueless, and necessarily so, because it is impossible to endow a phantom with life, or to find reality in a shadow.

What, then, it may be asked, is the object of discussing the Gersenist pretensions which have so often

been refuted? The justification lies in the necessity for promulgating Truth at all costs. The Gersenists seem to possess a rare combination of qualities. Like a certain Royal family once powerful in Europe, "They "forget nothing and learn nothing." Beaten out of the field to-day, they retire for a few years—perhaps for a generation—and then revive as fresh as ever. Defiant of history and logic, wholly oblivious of former defeats and of the arguments by which they have been vanquished, they again furbish up the rusty implements of bygone ages, and brandish exploded manuscripts, and even the famous *Diarium de Advocatis*, just as if all the world were as gullible as they are themselves.*

The well-informed smile, but the public at large are liable to be misled, and need some easily reached information to save them from obsolete delusions. The picture which I draw is not an unreal one. I pass unnoticed the lucubrations of ancient writers, whose opportunities of learning the truth were limited, and I shall mention only some strange modern illustrations of current error. A few years ago I found in Germany a Tauchnitz edition of *The Imitation*, translated into English by the Rev. W. Benham.† This translator, in a preface which exhibits singular ignorance of the controversy, avows himself a believer in Gersen. He is one of many dupes. Still more recently I purchased a beautiful Latin edition of *The Imitation*,

* See articles in the *Tablet*, from 1876 to 1884, by "A Cassinese "Benedictine;" also some signed "Monachus O. S. B."

† The Imitation of Christ. Translated by the Rev. W. Benham, B.D., Bernhard Tauchnitz. Leipsig: 1877.

published in Turin as the work of John Gersen of Caballiaco, Abbot of St. Stephen's at Vercelli! *

In 1874 a statue was erected in the parish church of Cavaglia in honour of Gersen, and in 1884 another similar memorial was unveiled at Vercelli. The latter ceremony gave occasion to the Archbishop of Turin, Cardinal Alimonda, to deliver an eloquent address, wherein he declares John Gersen to be the author of *The Imitation of Christ!* †

What, may I ask, do these statues prove?—The inextinguishable vigour of imagination. Gersen was the creation of Cajetan's fancy, as Minerva was of Jupiter's brain; but, as Father Becker quaintly observes, Italy is full of statues of Minerva, yet who would argue from thence that such a being ever existed? ‡

May I suggest to his Eminence, and to his hearers and readers, the perusal of a notice of this discourse from the pen of the Chanoine Delvigne, of Brussels.§ With all the dignity, self-restraint, and scholarly perspicuity which characterize this learned writer, he exposes, most respectfully, but scathingly, the startling indiscretion of such a pronouncement, coming from so

* De Imitatione Christi, Johannis Gersenii à Caballiaco. Turin: Marietti, 1885.

† Il Monumento Inaugurato a Giovanni Gersen nella Basilica di Santo Eusebio in Vercelli, il 1° Agosto, 1884; Discorso del Card. Alimonda, Archivescovo di Torino, pp. 6, 7. Torino: Tipographia Salesiana, 1884.

‡ Becker, p. 67.

§ La Statue de Jean Gersen à Verceil, par Ad. Delvigne. Bruxelles: Vromant, 1885.

high a dignitary, and from so privileged a ground as the pulpit of a cathedral.

So much for John Gersen, of Vercelli. I have endeavoured to discuss his candidature with becoming gravity, although often sorely tempted in the opposite direction. The Kempists, from the days of the witty Amort up to the present, seem unable to resist the ludicrous view of the contention. Withal, levity is manifestly out of place in the discussion of an historical problem, although if ever excusable it would be so in the present instance.

We have already seen that efforts have been made to discredit the claims of Thomas à Kempis to the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ* by certain critics who repudiate as well the pretensions of the Chancellor of Paris and of the so-called Gersen. It is time that I should now make a few observations respecting their peculiar views.

So far as I am aware, the earliest promoter of this idea was the German Benedictine who wrote the essay to which I have alluded, entitled, *Septem Motiva contra Thomam de Kempis.* According to his opinion, *The Imitation* is of German, and not Flemish, origin. I think he quite fails to establish his theory. A quarter of a century ago M. Tamizey de Larroque essayed to displace à Kempis on the grounds of internal evidence, and, failing to realize the philological aspect of the case, suggested a French origin for the book. He, like his predecessor, has not succeeded in proving

his contention. More recently M. Arthur Loth and the Père Denifle have come forward as anti-Kempists, supporting their opinions by arguments somewhat different from those of their predecessors. They, while contesting the claims of à Kempis, reject Gerson and Gersen with emphasis.

M. Loth, who holds that *The Imitation* was probably written by a member of the Congregation of Windesheim prior to the time of à Kempis, has placed his views before the public in a series of articles in the *Revue des Questions Historiques*, which occupy about one hundred and fifty pages octavo.* His conclusions are founded upon a certain manuscript which he discovered some years ago in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in which the first book of *The Imitation*, and fragments of the third and fourth, are found bound up with several treatises on spiritual and other subjects.† At the commencement of this collection is a calendar, which, according to Loth, points to the year 1406. Upon this very sandy foundation he builds up the theory that *The Imitation of Christ* was written before 1406, and that therefore Thomas could not have been its author, as he was only twenty-six years of age at that time.

A brief study suffices to upset this doctrine. Assuming, for the sake of brevity, that M. Loth is correct in believing that the calendar dates back to

* See vols. xiii., xv., and xxii., in the years 1873, 1874, and 1877.

† This manuscript is in the Cabinet des Estampes, Coté E a^2, Réserve.

1406, a very questionable point indeed, we have yet to learn at what period it and the other treatises in the volume, including the portions of *The Imitation*, were bound up together! On this point we have no indication whatsoever, and hence these fragments of *The Imitation* may just as well date fifty years later than the supposed calendar of 1406. The binding of the MS. is quite modern.

One of the most extensive publishers of spiritual books of the present day told me that he prepares his calendars every ten or fifteen years, and subsequently binds them with each new edition of the prayer-books for which they are drawn up. If this be the custom nowadays, why not also in olden times?*

Again, M. Loth endeavours to strengthen his assumption as to the date of *The Imitation of Christ* by dwelling on the fact that there are marginal notes in the manuscript which allude to it as the *De Imitatione Christi*—a term not applied to it in its earliest days.† Here I am obliged to remark that I believe he is not a careful observer. In June, 1884, I obtained an introduction from Lord Lyons which enabled me to examine this manuscript myself, and I am clearly of opinion that the aforesaid marginal notes *are not written in the same handwriting or ink as the rest of the manuscript.* If I am correct in this opinion, the conclusion based on these notes goes for nothing, as they may have been written fifty or a hundred years later than the manuscript.

* See Becker, p. 201 and following.

† Revue des Questions Historiques, vol. xiii., 1873, pp. 547–8.

Finally, in his third article,* M. Loth commits himself to an assertion which shows much want of care in the examination of the documents respecting which he writes. Commencing at page 488, we find a description of a manuscript, then the property of Count Riant, in which, among other treatises, is found the first book of *The Imitation of Christ*. Further on is a work of Floretus, bearing date 1416. Loth describes the manuscript as homogeneous—that is, written by one hand—and argues from thence that *The Imitation of Christ* was known before 1416.

I have no intention of disputing the fact that *The Imitation*—or, at all events, the first book—was extant at that period, when Thomas à Kempis was already thirty-six years of age—on the contrary, I fully believe it; but Loth's assertion that Count Riant's manuscript is homogeneous is positively erroneous. In September, 1885, M. Ruelens showed me photographs taken from different parts of this codex which prove beyond doubt that it was written by *several* copyists. Here, again, we find our author building on an unstable base a structure which falls to the ground. In short, a critical examination of M. Loth's elaborate articles forces us to the conclusion that, despite his great ingenuity, high literary ability, and very attractive style, his theories are unfounded and his conclusions unsound.

The most recent exponent of the theory so ably, but vainly, urged by Loth is the Reverend Père Henri

* Revue des Questions Historiques, vol. xxii., 1877, p. 488 and following.

Seuse Denifle, a learned Dominican, and subarchivist of the Vatican Library. As yet we have had no full exposition of his views, but we may assume from some fragmentary articles which he has published that he believes that the author of *The Imitation of Christ* was a German Canon Regular, name and habitation unknown, of date anterior to Thomas à Kempis.* Gerson he does not deem worthy of consideration, and Gersen he disavows emphatically, declaring that all the codices advanced in his favour—*Arona*, *De Advocatis*, and the rest—are fifteenth-century manuscripts. On this special point, as already observed, Denifle should be an exceptionally good judge, as his facilities for examining Italian manuscripts, of all centuries, dated and undated, are matchless.

If, however, his conclusions concerning *The Imitation* are to gain weight, they must be more worthy of confidence than his powers of observation. Already he has made a blunder both huge and incomprehensible, as follows:—The *Kirkheim Codex* of *The Imitation of Christ* has an inscription, written in a different handwriting from that of the rest of the manuscript, giving its date and certain particulars. Now, the Père Denifle boldly asserts that this inscription is pasted in, and not written on the leaf of the manuscript. Although I do not seek just now to press my belief that its date of 1425 is thoroughly trustworthy, nevertheless I am satisfied that the learned Dominican has in this instance committed himself to an allegation which is wholly

* Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, pp. 1–11.

indefensible. M. Ruelens, the accomplished Curator of the Manuscripts in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, where the *Kirkheim Codex* is kept, positively and emphatically denies the assertion. The Pastoor Spitzen and Fr. Becker add their weighty testimony in the same direction,* and I, having examined the manuscript in 1885 and 1887, am able to confirm their positive and indignant denial of so erroneous and misleading a statement.

Such is the position of M. Loth and the Rev. Père Denifle. If they prefer their theories to the established facts elicited in favour of Thomas à Kempis during this controversy, no one will dispute their right; but until they prove themselves more careful in observation and logical in reasoning they can scarcely expect men of ordinary mental calibre to accept their views or entertain them seriously.

In conclusion, I will quote here the words of the learned and impartial Canon Santini, wherewith he closes his able and exhaustive treatise on the authorship of *The Imitation of Christ*, and with which I most cordially and sincerely agree:—"Del resto noi "scrivemmo sempre guidati da sincero amore del vero; "avemmo sì il profondo convincimento della giustizia "della nostra causa, ma non cercammo mai di dis- "simularci il valore delle altrui ragioni se per caso ne "avessimo trovate di valide sul nostro cammino. Dopo "lungo studio della controversia noi possiamo ripetere "con la più candida sincerità che per noi, oggi, come

* Spitzen, Nouvelle Défense, etc., pp. 50–52, and also p. 168.

"prima, è una tesi storica circondata da ogni desiderabile "certezza, che Tommaso da Kempis è autore de' quattro "libri *dell'Imitatione.*"*

Before leaving the controversy, of which I need hardly say I have given a mere outline, principally with the intention of guiding others to its study, I shall recapitulate the evidence by offering a tabular view of the position of the candidates whose claims have been examined.

* Santini, 2nda parte, p. 211.

Thomas à Kempis.

(Born 1379 or '80; Died 1471.)

I.

Contemporary Witnesses.

Over twenty, of whom three knew him personally, and two were members of his own Order, testify in his favour.

II.

External Evidence of Manuscripts.

A preponderance of the most ancient and trustworthy manuscripts, many dating during his life, and one, in his own handwriting, points to him as the author.

III.

Internal Evidence.

In favour of à Kempis we find—

(1) Identity of style; including peculiarities, viz.— (Common to *The Imitation* and other works of à Kempis.)
- (*a*) Barbarisms.
- (*b*) Italianized words.
- (*c*) The word "devotus" used in a peculiar sense.
- (*d*) Dutch idioms.
- (*e*) Systematic rhythmical punctuation.

(2) *The Imitation*, largely derived from the writings of the "Circle of Windesheim," of which à Kempis was the leading exponent.

John Charlier de Gerson.

(Born 1363; Died 1429.)

I.

Contemporary Witnesses.

Not one to be found in his favour. Two (his brother and Ciresio) *negatively* adverse by their silence. Five, shortly after his time, *positively* testify against him.

II.

External Evidence of Manuscripts.

Not a single manuscript dated during his life, or for thirty years after his death, assigns the authorship to him.

III.

Internal Evidence.

Unfavourable to him in every point.

John Gersen.

Benedictine Abbot of Vercelli.

Existence wholly mythical and unproven. Claims to the authorship of *The Imitation* up to the present unsustained by one particle of evidence.

Hypotheses

Of the author of the *Septem Motiva*, of de Larroque, Loth, and Denifle.

Purely speculative.

PART V

THE reader who has had the patience to follow me up to this point will understand the feelings which led me to visit the scenes in which Thomas à Kempis spent his holy life. Filled with admiration for *The Imitation of Christ*, and with reverence for the man who I am satisfied was its author, I longed for many years to make this pilgrimage; to tread the ground once hallowed by his footsteps; to see the places, even changed as they must be, which he looked upon nearly five hundred years ago; and to kneel upon the very spots once sanctified by his teaching and example.

In the year 1875, while on my way to Russia, I happened to take the route to Kœnigsberg by Vlissingen and Cologne, and when within a couple of hours' railway journey of the latter city the train pulled up at Kempen. Kempen! the birthplace of Thomas à Kempis! Then and there, glancing at the little town, I resolved to visit it when I could.

Time was not at my command; eight years rolled

by, and already the autumn of 1883 had come before I was able to gratify my long-cherished desire. Meanwhile, after full consideration, I decided to make the journey in the order in which I have traced à Kempis' life, visiting Kempen first, and subsequently Deventer, Zwolle, Agnetenberg, and Windesheim. Any one disposed to follow my pilgrimage will find this route the most convenient. If not quite familiar with the Dutch and German tongues, he will need the services of an interpreter.

I had hoped when setting out that I might be able to procure photographs of each object of interest at Kempen and the other stages of my journey; but, to my great disappointment, I found that this was impossible. None existed, and I could not get them taken. All who are familiar with the practical details of photographic art know that for such an undertaking, where visits into the country are necessary, it is indispensable to have relays of dark slides, so that time may not be wasted in repeated visits to the dark workshop. Without such provision, time is sacrificed without measure, because it is requisite to take several views of each object, so many proving failures and only a small proportion satisfying the artist's expectations.

I may here state at once that, having made a careful survey of the scenes of à Kempis' life, I decided that in order to obtain the views I required I should first become a photographer myself, and then come back, provided with suitable apparatus. Return-

ing home, I devoted all the leisure I could spare to the study of photography, and in the summer of 1884 I went back to the Continent properly equipped, and retraced my steps. This time I took the views myself, and from them are drawn the woodcuts with which I illustrate this portion of my sketch.

The engravings were executed for me by Messrs. Oldham, of Dublin, whose name is a sufficient guarantee of accuracy. The two portraits of Thomas à Kempis are reproduced from photographs taken from the two most authentic pictures, by the autotype process. I have adopted this course in order to ensure such absolute fidelity as can alone render a likeness valuable.

It gives me sincere pleasure to record here the assistance I received in my photographic work from Mynheer Abraham Cohen, of Zwolle, who gave me special help in determining the exposure of the plates suited to the climate of Holland, and placed his dark chamber and workshop at my disposal. To his aid, and that of his venerable father, I am largely indebted for the fidelity of the illustrations I now offer.

During my travels I had, at different times, the assistance of most able interpreters—Mr. Bachirt, Mynheer Cossmann, and Mynheer Joan Van Ameringen. The latter, who is courier at the Amstel Hotel at Amsterdam, gave me special help during my second trip, when I took the photographs. On the greater part of my journey of 1883 I enjoyed the congenial society of my old friend and schoolfellow, Mr. Charles

Kennedy, of Dublin, whose interest in all we sought and visited was equal to my own.

Aided by the illustrations, obtained as I have described, I shall now conduct my reader over the scenes wherein à Kempis spent his life. Leaving Cologne by railway, a journey of two hours brought us to Kempen,* where we put up at the comfortable Hotel Vonz-Ponz. This building, looking upon the market-place, was once a church, as I could see from its external architecture, but, long since disused as such, it has been converted into a dwelling-house. I could not discover the name of the original church, or to what religious Order it had belonged. By good fortune I met in the evening, in the Speise-saal of the hotel, two noted inhabitants of Kempen—Dr. Otto Menden, the physician to the general hospital, and Herr Conrad Kramer, an accomplished archæologist, who has devoted much time and research to the study of the antiquities of the town, and has collected a remarkable museum specially rich in curiosities of antique ornamental metal-work. Both these gentlemen, the former of whom speaks French fluently, on learning the object of my visit, met my wishes with enthusiastic alacrity, and devoted themselves to showing me Kempen and its sights, detailing its history and traditions. During my second visit I had the further advantage of making the acquaintance of Herr Francis Xavier Hellner. This gentleman, who is noted for his erudition in all that concerns Kempen, ancient

* See map at end of volume.

and modern, is engaged in the manufacture upon a large scale of Church ornaments and sacred vessels of great beauty—an industry which has been traditional in the town from its earliest days. There are, I believe, few parts of the Continent in which we may not find specimens of high artistic skill issuing from his workshops, over which he kindly conducted me, explaining all details. I am indebted to the learned Kempist scholar, the Pastoor Spitzen of Zwolle, for this most valuable introduction, which led to my obtaining permission to photograph the interior of the parish church of Kempen.

Kempen, so named from the wide expanse of level country in which it is situated (*Campi*, in Latin), is nowadays a quaint little German town of some five thousand inhabitants,—cleanly, healthful, prosperous, and up to the present evidently intensely Catholic. It is not very often that one sees, even on the Continent, a priest in full ecclesiastical robes carrying the Blessed Sacrament through the streets to the sick and dying, preceded by an acolyte with lamp and bell, the people kneeling down most reverently while the august procession passes. Here, however, that touching spectacle is of daily occurrence.

Alighting from the train and entering the town from the railway station, we first passed a few handsome private houses, the dwellings of the wealthier inhabitants, and almost immediately came to the Gymnasium, or New School. This building, of which I give a woodcut, although considerably remodelled,

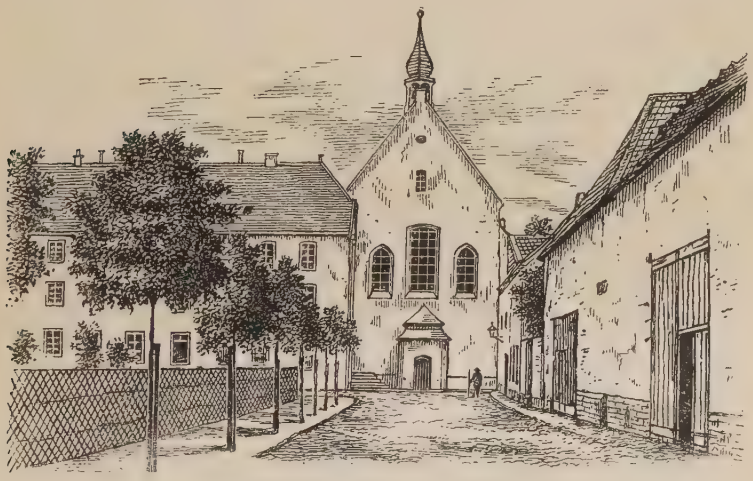
shows plainly that it was once a fortress. It was, in fact, the citadel of Kempen in the days when the town was fortified,—castellated, and surrounded by a huge moat, of which a portion is still unfilled. In this castle the Archbishops of Cologne had their local residence, and from it exercised their sway, both temporal and spiritual. It was built about the date of Thomas à Kempis' birth, and doubtless he often wandered round it in his boyhood ere he left his birthplace to join his

GYMNASIUM AT KEMPEN.

elder brother John at Deventer. At present it is the public high school of Kempen, under the direction of the Government, and admirably arranged to suit the wants of the inhabitants.

Passing on a very short distance, and keeping to the right, we came to a church and seminary adjoining. These belong to the Franciscan Fathers, and the church is called the Paterkirk of Kempen. Of simple and unpretending style, this mass of building forms

a substantial and capacious institution. Tradition tells that the seminary stands upon the site of the old gymnasium, or public school, of Kempen, while the church itself is built where one more ancient stood which belonged to the Congregation of Common Life. Within the church, on the left-hand side of the sanctuary, is a life-size oil painting of Thomas. He is represented sitting in the open air, surrounded by his



FRANCISCAN CHURCH AT KEMPEN.

books, and behind in the distance are buildings, doubtless intended to represent the monastery of Mount St. Agnes. He is clothed in the habit of the Augustinian Order, white and black; the head is large, the forehead broad, the eyes and complexion dark, and the expression highly intelligent. This picture is undated, but I should say not very ancient.

Leaving the Franciscan church, and turning to the left, a short walk through the Burgstrasse brings us to

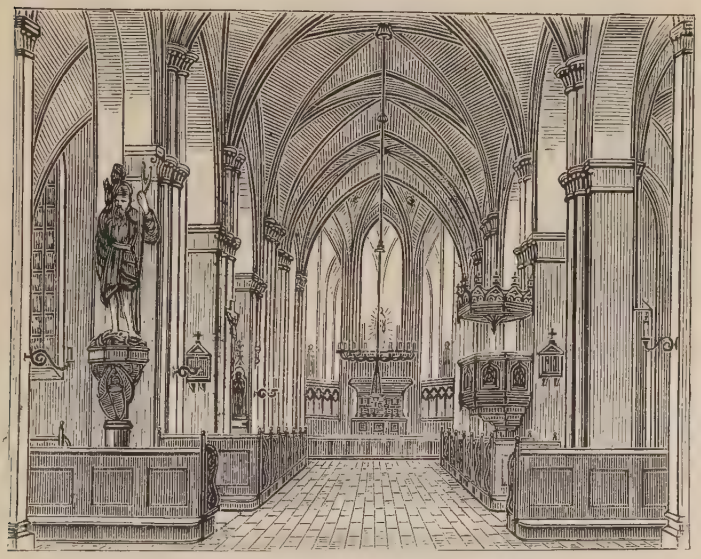
the parish church and its surrounding close, passing on the left-hand side the Protestant church of Kempen, a small red brick building of no architectural pretensions.

The parish church, dedicated to Our Blessed Lady, is a Gothic edifice, of large size and severe style. It is built on the site of an older church, parts of which enter into its structure, and it occupies as well a

EXTERIOR OF THE PARISH CHURCH OF KEMPEN.

portion of the ancient burial-place of Kempen. It is now surrounded by a close and a narrow grass plot, which enables the visitor to walk entirely round it. Although plain exteriorly, it is handsome within, with its Gothic pillars and fine nave and aisles. Entering the church by the porch, and passing the vestibule, we find on the right an oil-painting of Thomas, representing him in alb and cope kneeling before an altar.

The face is a noble profile, not unlike that in the Paterkirk, the hair white and flowing. This picture is undated, but evidently modern. Penetrating to the choir, we find it of great antiquity, the carved benches of the left side being the old choir seats of the original church, and the remainder, scarcely less antique, matching them perfectly. Walking outside



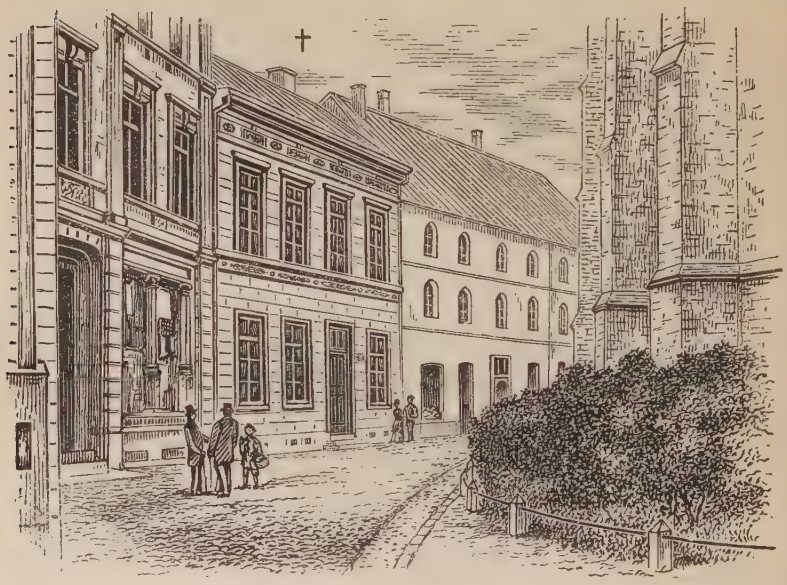
INTERIOR OF THE PARISH CHURCH AT KEMPEN.

the choir, we find on the left-hand wall a very old fresco, almost effaced by time, but prized so highly that it is protected by a curtain and only shown to visitors as a special favour. This fresco, too, belonged to the old church, and doubtless Thomas often saw it, as well as the choir.

Again returning to the porch, and walking up

towards the altar, we observe two side-doors on the right hand leading out upon the close. We shall pass out by the second door, that nearest to the altar, and then indeed we see what must interest us deeply.

Let me refer to the accompanying sketch, which supposes the observer to stand looking down the close, having the buttresses of the church on the right, and



THE SITE OF JOHN HAEMERKEN'S HOUSE.

the houses bounding the close on the left. Over portion of one of these houses I have placed a little cross. It indicates the site of the humble dwelling once occupied by John and Gertrude Haemerken and their children. *This is the spot on which Thomas à Kempis was born.*

We have no record of the death of either of the parents, but we may assume that both died before

1402, as we find evidence that the house was sold by their sons in that year.* At this period John à Kempis was about thirty-seven years of age, and his brother Thomas about twenty-two.

Immediately beyond the site of the Haemerkens' house we observe a large plain building. This latter occupies the site of the children's school of old Kempen,

THE STADHUIS OF KEMPEN.

very probably the one presided over by à Kempis' mother. At present the lower part is devoted to shops, while the upper rooms are used as an almshouse for the infirm, aged, and poor of the town, who are supported from the municipal funds.

Leaving the close and entering the market-place, we find the Stadhuis, or Guildhall, of which I give a

* See Mooren, p. 233.

sketch, and in the council-room may be seen another painting of à Kempis. It is obviously modern, dating, I believe, about 1750, and utterly fanciful, showing a long white beard, and in nowise resembling the authentic portraits. The three pictures found at Kempen are interesting as proofs of the reverence in which the saintly man is held in his native town, but have no claim to be looked on as real likenesses. For

OLD STREET IN KEMPEN.

this reason I have not thought it worth while to reproduce them.

Herr Hellner advised me to go and see a little church, situated about half a mile to the east of the town, which had escaped my notice during my first visit. It dates back to the early portion of the ninth century, and is dedicated to St. Peter. Setting forth to make

this visit I passed the General Hospital, and Herr Conrad Kramer's house and museum, and looking back for a moment was struck by the quaint view of an old street of Kempen. I could not resist the temptation, so I fixed my camera and took the picture.

Reaching the church of St. Peter, with its adjoin-

CHURCH OF ST. PETER, OUTSIDE KEMPEN.

ing school, I found it most interesting from its extraordinary age and wonderful preservation. It is used up to the present as a chapel of ease for the benefit of the villagers around. In Thomas' day it was still more frequented, and doubtless often by him. The accompanying sketch represents it faithfully.

Now, turning back towards Kempen—thinking of

the days when Thomas lived there, a child, a boy, a stripling—I took, "*in memoriam*," a bird's-eye view. I reproduce it now. The level expanse of surrounding country is well seen, and in the distance the principal buildings may be traced; on the right the Gymnasium, with its castellated towers, on the left the parish church, with its lofty spire, and between these two the church of the Franciscan Fathers.

KEMPEN, SEEN FROM ST. PETER'S CHURCH.

Such is the quaint little German town which gave birth to the great Thomas à Kempis, nurtured him till his thirteenth year, and then sent him forth to do giant work in the vineyard of God, calling souls innumerable, in every age and country, to serve, love, and imitate their Divine Lord and Master.

Let us now look at the map and observe the position of Deventer, whither the youthful à Kempis went about the year 1392, in pursuit of his studies. Full a

hundred miles it is from Kempen, and in those primitive times the journey must have been an arduous one for the boy. How Thomas travelled there we know not. Very probably a good deal by the Rhine, which he could easily reach near Uerdingen or Duisburg, and follow thence to Arnheim. By taking the Yssel near Arnheim, the remainder of his journey to Deventer might be made in a few hours. Nowadays the railway unites Kempen and Deventer, and even on a sedate Dutch line it needs little more than four hours to make the trip. The journey is not interesting, the country being flat and monotonous, except in the immediate neighbourhood of Arnheim, where it becomes hilly and even picturesque. Alighting from the train, and passing out of the well-appointed station, a walk of about a hundred yards brought us to the neat Keizer Hotel, where we established ourselves. Sallying forth to pursue our investigation, we traversed the whole of Deventer in a couple of hours, finding it an exquisitely clean and evidently prosperous Dutch town of some twenty thousand inhabitants. Modern Deventer is famed for its ironworks and carpet factories, and derives great wealth therefrom. It is also celebrated for its spiced bread, which is exported all over the world.

To avoid needless delay, I shall at present confine myself to the description of those parts of the city which are associated with the history of Thomas à Kempis and the Congregation of Common Life.

From the market-place, which is near the Keizer

Hotel, a good-sized street runs off, called the Lange Bisshops Straat. Passing up it for a short distance we meet, on the right, a very narrow lane called Pontsteeg. Following this lane we come to the Engel Straat, and just opposite the junction of these two roads we shall stand for a few minutes and look up and down.

Looking to the right, up the Engel Straat, let us observe the sixth house from the corner of the Pont-

SITE OF GROOT'S HOUSE AT DEVENTER.

steeg. I give an illustration, and have placed a little cross to indicate the exact spot. This cross is just over the site of the house of Gerard Groot. It was here that he lived during his memorable career in Deventer, while organizing with Florentius Radewyn the constitution of the Congregation of Common Life.

Now, looking down the Pontsteeg, through which we have only lately walked, let us observe the imposing building on the right-hand side. I have marked it in the illustration by the cross placed above. This is the modern High School of Deventer, built on the site of the old school, the school of Groot's time, in which Florentius' friend, John Boehm, filled the office of Rector, and Arnold van Schoonhoven and Thomas

MODERN HIGH SCHOOL OF DEVENTER.

à Kempis were day scholars. In former times a passage led from the rear of Groot's house to this college.

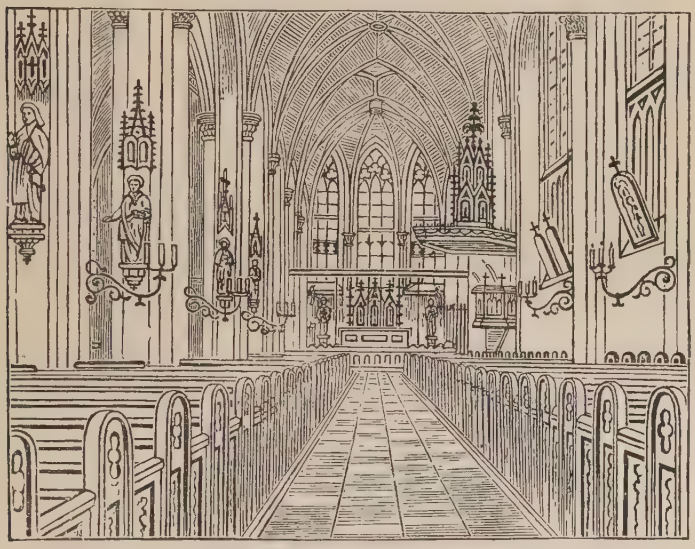
Now, turning to the left, we look down the Broedern Straat (continuous with the Engel Straat), at the end of which stands the Broedern Kerk. Both the street and the church are well shown in the view given on the following page.

Next, let us walk down the Broedern Straat and enter the church. On the occasion of my second visit to Deventer I brought a letter of introduction from the Pastoor Roelofs, of Zwolle, to the Pastoor of the Broedern Kerk, thanks to which all its treasures were opened to view, and I was allowed to take a photograph of the interior, which I reproduce. The

BROEDERN STRAAT AND KERK.

Broedern Kerk, the only Catholic church at present in Deventer, is a beautiful specimen of Gothic architecture. The great interest which attaches to it lies in the fact that it is built on the site of an older church, which, together with an adjoining monastery, long since demolished, belonged to the brothers of Common Life, and hence derives its name. In addition it is a centre of attraction for those interested in the

subject of this sketch, because in the sacristy are preserved the skulls of Gerard Groot and Florentius Radewyn. This church contains, moreover, other treasures of priceless value—namely, the relics of St. Lebuin, of St. Marcellinus, and of the holy Abbess Mildred. Here also is preserved the chalice of St. Lebuin, dating back to the eighth century.



INTERIOR OF THE BROEDERN KERK.

I examined with close attention the skulls of Groot and Radewyn, which are kept in a little glass cabinet placed on the top of the press containing the vestments in the sacristy. Owing to the height at which the cabinet is situated, I found it necessary to use a ladder in order to make a careful inspection. Both are beautifully formed heads, indicating high intellectual

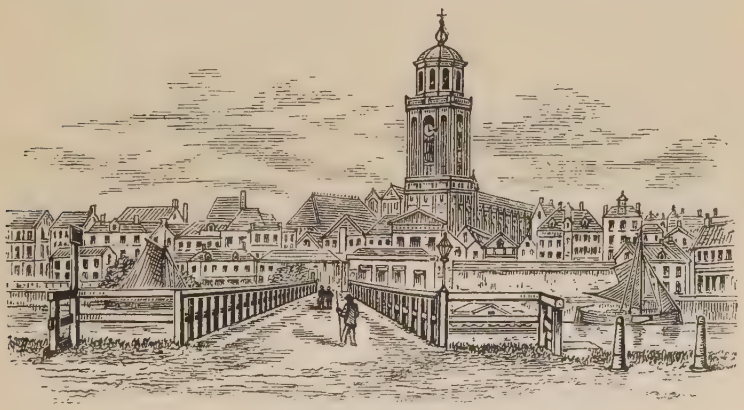
capacity, and are in excellent preservation. Groot's skull is placed to the right, that of Florentius to the left. As I was not permitted to open the cabinet, I could not take accurate measurements, but I was able to observe certain details of formation in Gerard's head which are highly interesting from a phrenological point of view, and upon which I will enter later when describing the skull of Thomas à Kempis.

According to local tradition, the house of Florentius, so often alluded to in this essay, was situated at the rear of the Broedern Kerk, in the waste space between it and the present railway station, but now no trace of it exists. Certain it is, however, that the localities which I have described, the Broedern and Engel Straat, the Pontsteeg, and also the precincts of the Church of St. Lebuin, were often trodden by Groot, Radewyn, à Kempis, and their holy companions. I am indebted for much of the information concerning Deventer, which I now give, to the highly intelligent sacristan of the Broedern Kerk, in whose charge I was placed by the parish priest—no doubt owing to the influential letter of introduction from my good friend, the Pastoor Roelofs.

Leaving the Broedern Kerk, and returning to the Pontsteeg, we pass through the latter, and re-entering the Lange Bisshops Straat, ascend it until we reach an open space in which is situated the Groote Kerk, or Church of St. Lebuin. It is a grand old Gothic structure. Built originally in the eleventh century, it was burned down in 1366, the crypt alone, with its

magnificent frescoes, escaping, and subsequently rebuilt so rapidly that it was completed in 1400. This was the church of which we may remember John Boehm and Florentius Radewyn were curates, the latter having resigned his canonry at Utrecht in order to be near his beloved master, Gerard Groot. In it, in front of the altar dedicated to St. Paul, Florentius was buried in 1400.

St. Lebuin's is now a Protestant church, and, like all such in Holland, is undecorated, and whitewashed



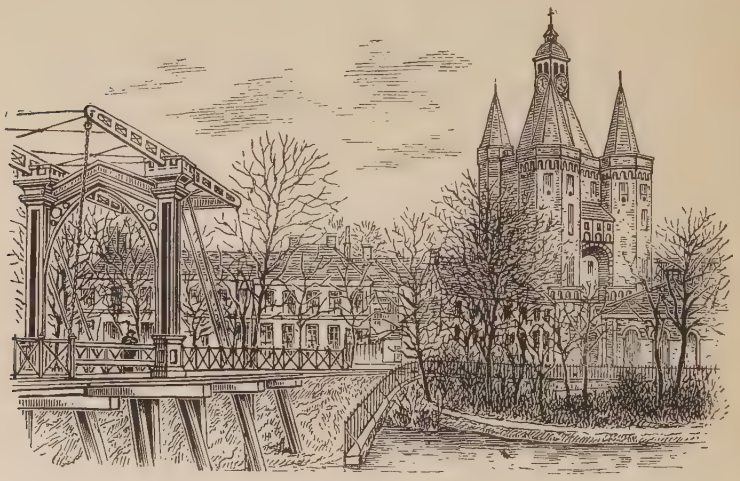
ST. LEBUIN'S AND DEVENTER, FROM THE FAR SIDE OF THE YSSEL.

interiorly in a fashion so hideous that it is necessary to see in order to believe. Leaving the open space surrounding it, we crossed the Yssel, from the far side of which we obtained a magnificent view of the old cathedral, towering above the city. The accompanying sketch represents it well.

About an hour's journey by railway brought us from Deventer to Zwolle, a distance of some twenty-

four miles. Just four miles south of the latter city we passed Windesheim on the left hand, the site of the famous monastery with which we are already familiar. Later I shall give a description of all that remains of it.

Leaving the railway station, we enter Zwolle, a model Dutch city, and one of the prettiest in Holland, with its numerous canals, drawbridges, and handsome



VIEW IN ZWOLLE, WITH THE SASSENPOORT.

buildings. All around we see the exquisitely neat villas of the wealthier inhabitants, with their trim gardens and pleasure-grounds reaching down to the water's edge. The sketch I now give shows a view of the Sassenpoort, the historic Gothic entrance to the town, with its four pointed towers. A little further on we catch a glimpse of the handsome Catholic Cathedral of our Blessed Lady, in which I subsequently

had the happiness of attending High Mass, celebrated by the parish priest, the Pastoor Spitzen.

Reaching the market-place, we took up our quarters in the comfortable Herren-logement Hotel, to which we were cordially welcomed by its courteous landlord, Mynheer Jansens.

A few hours sufficed to show us Zwolle, a town of some twenty-two thousand inhabitants, the capital

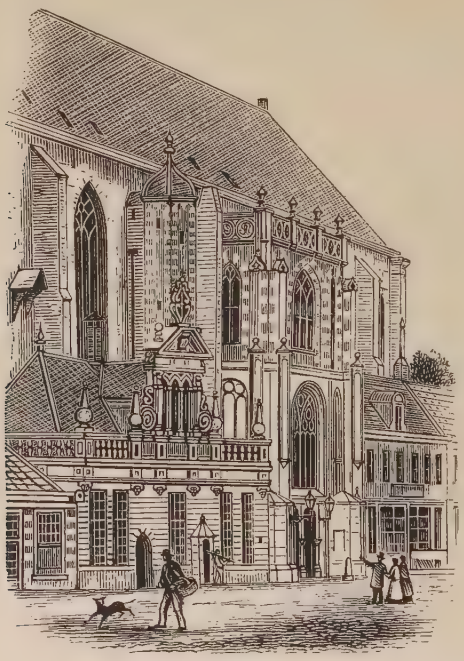
CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE DAME, AT ZWOLLE.

of the Province of Overyssel, and a picture of orderliness and prosperity. As in the case of Deventer, so also here I shall confine my descriptions to the special objects which bear upon the subject of my essay. These are—the church of St. Michael, Mount St. Agnes, Windesheim; the Zwolle portrait of Thomas à Kempis, and, lastly, his relics.

Just opposite our hotel, at the other side of the

market-place, is the grand old Gothic church of St. Michael. We shall enter it by the side door, which is represented in the sketch appended.

This was the church to which Thomas came in 1399, when on his way from Deventer to Mount St. Agnes. Here it was he sought the indulgence



ENTRANCE TO ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, FROM THE MARKET-PLACE.

given that year by Pope Boniface IX. to all who, complying with the usual conditions, subscribed towards the completion of the edifice. Now it is a Protestant church. At the time of my visit the interior was filled with scaffolding, so I could not take a photograph, but need I say how reverently I paced

its lengthy nave, traced out the limits of the old sanctuary, and thought of the day when Thomas à Kempis knelt there to receive Holy Communion. Leaving the building, I wandered round its precincts, and catching a glimpse of its quaint eastern extremity, placed my camera and took the view I now offer.

Next we shall proceed to Agnetenberg, the site of the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, the home of

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, SEEN FROM THE EAST.

à Kempis for more than seventy years, and where he died in 1471. A drive of about two miles, to the north-east of Zwolle, brings us to the spot. On leaving the town we enter a little suburb, and, having passed through the Thomas à Kempis Straat, then traverse a flat expanse with the familiar aspect of a Dutch landscape, fields and dykes, black and white cattle, and the ever-industrious windmills. At length,

having passed on the left the Catholic cemetery and its pretty church, we reach a high road bordered with trees. A little further on we meet the entrance-gate to Agnetenberg, which nowadays is a prosperous and well-tended farm.

A few minutes' drive brings us to the house of the caretaker, which is used, not alone as a residence, but also an inn or hostelry, to accommodate the

ENTRANCE TO AGNETENBERG.

numerous visitors who flock to see the famous spot—the Bergkloster, as it is called by the people of Zwolle. Leaving the carriage, we now walk up the hill to visit the site of the old monastery. Of that historic building not one stone remains upon another, so complete was its destruction, as of nearly all similar institutions in Holland, during the frenzied persecution of the Catholics in the sixteenth and succeeding centuries.

Here and there on the surface I thought I could trace some outlines of foundations, but they were

INN AT AGNETENBERG.

barely discernible. The site of the convent is a very slightly elevated plateau, from which the surrounding

SITE OF THE OLD MONASTERY AT MOUNT ST. AGNES.

country is well seen. It is occupied by a couple of

farmhouses and a school, on one side of which is situated the favourite Protestant cemetery of the district.

Looking westward, we see Zwolle lying in the distant lowlands, and now observe that unconsciously we had been gradually ascending from the time we left it. The outline of its buildings may be traced in the sketch annexed. The tower and belfry of Notre Dame on the right, the Sassenpoort to the left, and

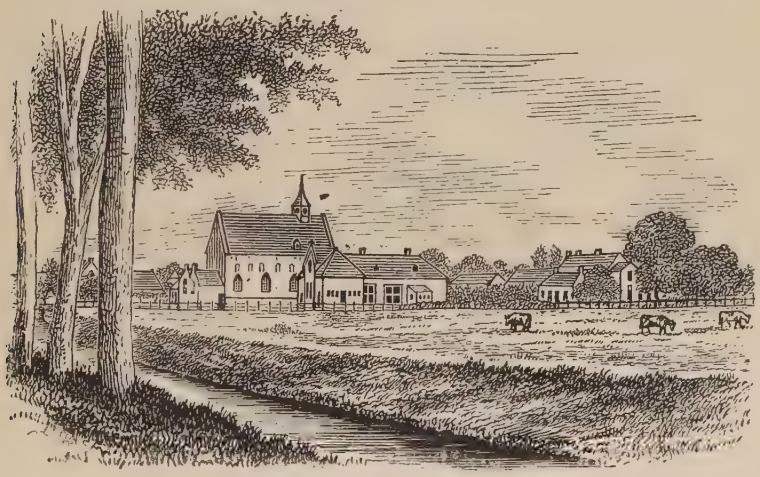
ZWOLLE, SEEN FROM MOUNT ST. AGNES.

between the two the massive roof of the church of St. Michael.

Such at the present time is Mount St. Agnes, the hallowed spot where, over four centuries ago, à Kempis lived and taught, where he garnered the spiritual wisdom and holiness of the far-famed "Circle of Win-"desheim," and bound them together in his wondrous writings, and especially in *The Imitation of Christ.*

Our next visit shall be to Windesheim, to see the ruins of that once-famous monastery—the Mother

House of the Congregation of Common Life and of its Augustinian guardians. A drive of about four miles to the south of Zwolle brings us to the spot. All we find is a little hamlet and church. The woodcut given below faithfully represents it as seen from the high road. The church, which is Protestant, is formed in part by the only portion of the ancient building still existing. It is believed, from many architectural evi-



WINDESHEIM, SEEN FROM THE HIGH ROAD.

dences, that it consists of the remains of what was the brewery of the convent. The interior, as I shall explain, contains much to interest the explorer.

Entering the porch, we observe the usual characteristics of the Protestant churches of Holland—hideous wooden benches, a high reading-desk, and bare white-washed walls. At the suggestion of the very obliging verger, I walked up the nave and entered, by a door on the left, a small room at the upper end. This

apartment is now used for lectures and catechetical instructions, but to me it was deeply interesting from the fact that the wall which separates it from the adjoining church was partly covered by two old tombstones let into the solid masonry.

These monuments belonged, I have no doubt, to the ancient monastery, and the wall on which they are visible was very probably a portion of the original church. The inscriptions were so much effaced by time and wear that I was unable to decipher them, and unfortunately I was not at the moment prepared to take rubbings for future examination. That they belonged to the ancient monastery is, I think, scarcely open to question, both on account of their great age, and from the fact that until the comparatively recent construction of the present church, no use had ever been made of these ruins from their earliest date. Ascending to the belfry I found conclusive evidences of the antiquity of the building—the cells and narrow winding staircases, such as we meet with in the precincts of old churches and cloisters.

The reader who has followed me from the beginning will understand how many solemn memories were evoked and conjured up by this visit to Windesheim, and how I lingered wandering about it, thinking of Gerard Groot and his dying instructions; of Florentius Radewyn, the faithful executor of his master's wishes; of Berthold ten Have, John à Kempis, the brothers Wilsen, Vos van Huesden, William Vornken, and the goodly roll of names of those who worked as

THOMAS À KEMPIS.
Zwolle portrait.

pioneers of the great revival which sought to bring back Christendom to the fervour and purity of the Apostolic age.

But I must not tarry; we have much more to see at Zwolle. Returning from Windesheim I next sought for the relics of Thomas à Kempis, which I longed to visit and examine. Being under the impression that they were preserved in the Church of Notre Dame at Zwolle, I presented myself to the sacristan and asked permission to see them. He at once informed me that they had never been in that church, but that I should find them in the sacristy of the Church of St. Michael the Archangel, in the Nieuw Straat. Subsequently I called upon the Pastoor Spitzen, at his residence in the Voorstraat, and he confirmed the statement of the sacristan, adding a brief account of the exhumation of the remains of the great Windesheimer, and of their subsequent history. In the Appendix to this volume I give a detailed account of this event.*

The Pastoor Spitzen, who, as we know from his works already quoted, is one of the most erudite and indefatigable of the modern defenders of the rights of Thomas, received me with the utmost kindness, and granted me a long interview, during which he related many interesting circumstances connected with his researches. He also showed me the famous Zwolle portrait of Thomas à Kempis, which is believed to have been taken during life. Old and faded as it is, the face and figure, with the outlines of the landscape,

* Appendix D.

are quite clear, as may be seen from the accompanying autotype, which is executed from a photograph taken from the picture.

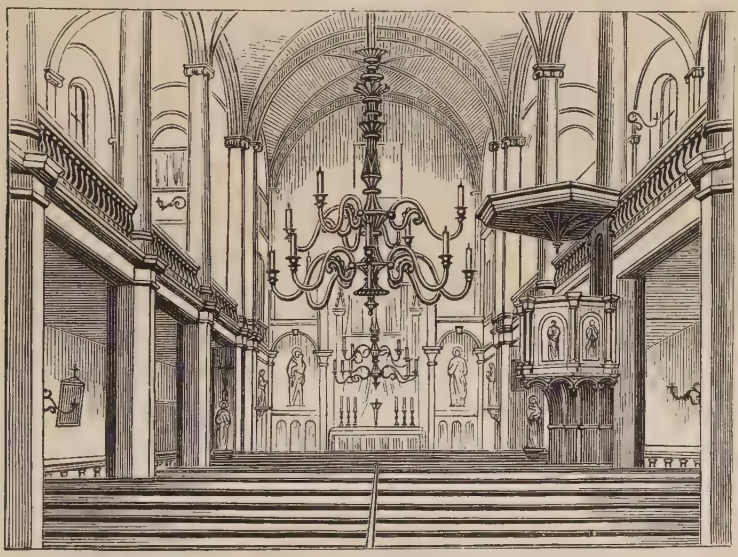
An inscription can still be deciphered on the original, written at the lower border of the habit, in the characters of the first half of the fifteenth century, as follows: "Ætatis 59." Remembering, then, that Thomas was born in 1380, it is evident that this portrait was executed in 1439. A most interesting account of the picture, and of its history and vicissitudes, will be found in the Pastoor Spitzen's work, *Thomas à Kempis, Als Schrijver der Navolging*, etc., pp. 182–186, in which he dwells on the fact that its existence shows the great veneration in which à Kempis was held long before his death, for he was the only Windesheimer of whom a likeness has been handed down.

My next step was to visit the relics of Thomas à Kempis, in the sacristy of the church of St. Michael the Archangel in the Nieuw Straat. I called first upon the parish priest, the Pastoor Roelofs, at his house in the Rosmarin Straat, and having explained my wishes, was received by him with grace and kindness peculiarly his own. At once he granted me all the privileges I desired. With deep regret I have heard of his recent death.

It may be interesting to many of my readers to know that a bond of sympathy arose on the moment between the Pastoor Roelofs and myself from our knowledge of a mutual deeply respected friend. Finding that I came from Ireland, he inquired at once for

Father Edmund O'Reilly, of the Society of Jesus, whom he told me he had known intimately in Rome during his student days. With great sorrow I informed him that Father O'Reilly had died some years ago, and the Pastoor learned from me with profound interest the details of his illness and last moments.

Leading me to the sacristy of St. Michael's, he showed me the sarcophagus in which are preserved



INTERIOR OF THE CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL.

the mortal remains of the great Monk of Agnetenberg. This casket is a wooden box, some thirty-seven inches long by fifteen wide and twenty deep. It bears a scroll on one side, neatly carved, and inscribed with the words "Reliquiae pii Thomae à Kempis." According to ecclesiastical law, the relics are not kept in the church itself, owing to the fact that Thomas has not been

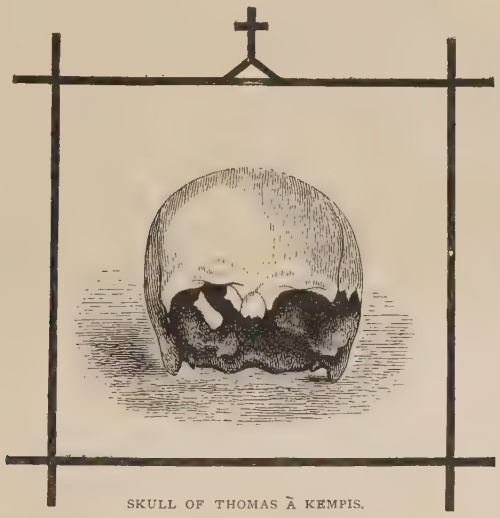
canonized, or even beatified. The reasons of this strange omission are not difficult of explanation, but need not be discussed here. Some delay arose about opening the casket, as the key was not to be found; but forthwith a locksmith was sent for, and that difficulty overcome. Within I found about one-half of a male human skeleton, including the skull, portions of the pelvis, the thigh bone, the bones of the leg and arm, ribs, vertebræ, and small bones of the hand and foot; also some fragments of textile fabrics, portions of the vestments in which, as a priest, the holy man was buried; some very old documents, referring to the attestation of the fact that these relics are in truth those of Thomas à Kempis, and a few more recent papers. The remains were greatly mouldered, and I should think that many missing portions of the skeleton had crumbled to dust.

Having carefully examined all, I replaced them in the casket, with the exception of the skull, which I retained for a special purpose.

Wishing to take a photograph of it, and finding the sacristy too dark for the purpose, I asked and readily obtained the Pastoor Roelofs' permission to bring it into the church, where the light was excellent.

Most reverently I carried it into the sanctuary, feeling how unworthy I was even to touch it, and placed it on a little table in a suitable position. Now, with the assistance of Mynheer Cohen, I succeeded in obtaining an excellent picture. The accompanying woodcut reproduces it faithfully, showing a noble head,

with high vaulted summit, indicating a large development of the faculty of veneration, which, as we know, characterized the saintly possessor. Gauged carefully with tape and calipers, the cranium gives the following measurements :—The circumference at the widest part, along the brow and occipital protuberance, is twenty inches and three-quarters ; its diameter, from forehead to occiput, seven inches and three-eighths ; and from



SKULL OF THOMAS À KEMPIS.

one parietal bone to the other, five inches and five-eighths. These measurements, combined with the high elevation of the dome of the skull, prove that à Kempis' brain was of more than ordinary dimension.

I was not a little struck by the absence of the lower jaw, one of the least destructible of the bones of the skeleton, and on inquiry I discovered a very curious episode in the history of these relics, which is not

without its significance, and is worthy of being related here. It appears that in the year 1847 Dom Pitra, now Cardinal Pitra, a very learned Benedictine, visited the Low Countries, and took the opportunity of examining the remains of Thomas à Kempis. Subsequently he asked to be allowed to bring a relic of the great Augustinian to the Benedictine monastery of Solesmes, and, wonderful to add, he was given the lower jaw. One of the documents I found in the casket is his acknowledgment of this great favour.

Is it not remarkable that a member of the Order which has so pertinaciously striven to deprive Thomas of the glory of being the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, and to represent him as a mere copyist, should have asked for a relic of him! But we must not forget that a large section of the most learned members of the great Order of St. Benedict never believed in Gersen, and willingly gave honour where honour was due. Dom Pitra declared to Dr. Campbell, the erudite Director of the Royal Library at The Hague, his opinion that *The Imitation* had its cradle in the Low Countries, and did not even mention Gersen! *

There is a peculiarity in the cranium of Thomas à Kempis which could not escape a practised eye, and on which I wish to make a few observations. The lofty well-formed forehead presents in a very singular degree an inequality between the right and left hemispheres, the right segment being prominent and

* See Becker, pp. 68–70.

largely developed, while the left is flattened and deficient. The woodcut shows this very well. This formation is one with which I am familiar, and I can point to several examples within my own knowledge. In one particular case the subject of it is a person of exceptional intellectual capacity.

Without wishing to strain a theory beyond reasonable limits, I think it right to observe that the present state of medical knowledge leads us, by the path traced out by the late illustrious Paul Broca, to the belief that the faculty of speech as a means of conveying ideas is situated in the anterior portion of the left hemisphere of the brain. According to this theory, we should be prepared to find either development or deficiency in this region according as the subject was gifted in speech or disposed to silence. As a matter of fact, we know that Thomas à Kempis was a lover of silence, and undoubtedly the formation of his cranium corresponds to this disposition. On the other hand, we know that Gerard Groot was a man of exceptional eloquence, and it was with special interest that I examined his skull, at Deventer, to ascertain its contour. Gerard's head is also a noble one, but, remarkable to say, it presents, as we might expect on theoretical grounds, an outline the exact reverse of that observed in the skull of Thomas à Kempis, the left segment of the forehead being more developed than the right. As I have already stated, I do not attempt to press a purely theoretical view, but offer it, in passing, for what it may be worth, and all the more

diffidently as it is only the skull, and not the brain itself, which I have been able to inspect.

Before concluding this account of my examination of à Kempis' relics, I wish to add a brief note on the subject of his stature. Some of his historians leave us under the impression that he was decidedly below middle height, whereas the pictures, even the most ancient, do not bear out this statement. It strikes me as probable that this idea may have arisen from confounding Thomas' stature with that of his brother John, who, according to the words of Busch, was "short in figure and weakly in body." *

I did not neglect the opportunity of ascertaining his real height, calculated from the length of the thigh-bone, according to the formula well known to anatomists. Following this rule, I arrived at the conclusion that Thomas à Kempis stood at least five feet six inches.†

My examination completed, I replaced the venerated remains in their casket, closed it carefully, and thanked, as best as I could, the good Pastoor Roelofs, who had so kindly given me such privileges.

Far as I have wandered, and often as I have trodden sacred places and beheld many relics, I can truthfully say that I never felt more deeply impressed than in beholding and touching those of Thomas à Kempis. This is not difficult to understand. If our reverence for one distinguished for holiness is

* Chronicle of Windesheim, book ii., chap. xxxv.

† Appendix E.

proportioned to the influence he has exercised for good, where shall we find the equal of the great Monk of Agnetenberg, whose saintly counsels and earnest teaching of the love and following of Christ stand pre-eminent, and must last for all ages and nations until the end of time ?

One, and only one, painful thought crossed my mind. I could not but regret to behold this priceless treasure concealed in so humble a receptacle, now time-worn and covered with dust. I longed to see it placed, casket and all, in a more fitting reliquary, with a plate-glass lid, through which its contents might be viewed. I spoke with the Pastoor Roelofs on the subject, and told him how willingly I should contribute towards carrying out this wish. I know many who will aid me, and possibly before long I may be instrumental in accomplishing this good work.

A monument to à Kempis has often been spoken of, either at Kempen, Zwolle, or on the site of the old Bergkloster. He needs it not. His works outlive him, and must survive :—

". . . Monumentum aere perennius."

My reader will understand how, having sought out and visited the various places wherein Thomas à Kempis and his saintly companions lived, having seen and studied his relics and those of Gerard and Florentius, I fell to musing and thinking of the days, so many centuries gone by, when they, in the flesh,

had trodden these very spots, and laboured for the love of God and charity to mankind. Then, too, I pondered over the book which so beautifully portrays and faithfully reflects their devoted holy lives, and I began to choose out passages to illustrate each stage and crisis, until at last the time ran on, and I had almost forgotten in my dreaming that it was needful to turn my footsteps homeward.

But now indeed it is time that I should close this lengthy story, and release my wearied reader. My work is done, my pilgrimage ended, and I must go. Ere leaving Zwolle I wandered out to Mount St. Agnes, to tread with love and reverence its hallowed precincts. It was a lovely evening, and I lingered on to watch the setting sun. Those who know what a summer sunset in Holland is can realize the weird and solemn scene, as the blood-red orb, hugely magnified, sinks in the misty expanse, bathing the horizon in a flood of golden light.

Standing on the spot where, near five centuries ago, à Kempis prayed and laboured for his Master's love, where all the mysticism, holiness, and benevolence which fill his writings entered and permeated his soul, I began to think how he must often have gazed on this very scene, and from the heights of the Bergkloster watched the spires of the Sassenpoort and Zwolle glittering and fading in the changing light. Thence I came to meditate on that May evening, when, in his own poetic phrase, "the day of Eternity dawned, and "the shadow of mortality sank down," when he stood

in the white light of God's presence, beholding the Kingdom of Heaven and the long-promised reward!

What a moment for that faithful loving soul! How transcendent his own words!

"Oh, what a view—what a pure intuition!—How "blessed the eye with which God, the Truth, is beheld "without images and corporeal similitudes.

* * * * * *

"Grant me, O Lord, that '*in Thy light I may see* "'*the light.*' Not the light of heaven or of earth, of "angels or of men, but the eternal light, uncreated, "immense, ineffable, incomprehensible, superessential, "and unchangeable."

APPENDICES.

A (page vi.).

In reference to the peculiar views put forward by the Rev. S. Kettlewell and others, we find the following apposite observations made by the Rev. Chanoine Delvigne :—

"Pourquoi nous faut-il ajouter que M. Kettlewell voit en Thomas "à Kempis un précurseur de la Réforme? Avons-nous besoin de "dire combien on se trompe en cherchant à faire du pieux Chanoine "Régulier de Zwolle un ancêtre de Luther ou d'Henri VIII.? Nous "ne dissimulerons pas les désordres du XV^e^. siècle; depuis long-"temps on demandait dans l'Église une réforme, non pas du dogme "qui est immuable, mais bien de la discipline qui est, de sa nature, "sujette à changement. Nous ne répéterons pas ici après tant "d'autres la première page, classique en théologie, de l'immortelle "*Histoire des Variations*. Cette heureuse réforme fut entreprise par "le Concile de Trente, continuée par les papes et les évêques, "exécuteurs naturels des décrets de cette sainte assemblée. Nous "le savons bien; il sied à nos frères séparés, à MM. Moll, Acquoy, "Kettlewell, de faire un arbre généalogique aux réformateurs du "XVI^e^. siècle et d'y placer toute la Congrégation de Windesheim, "le Franciscain Jean Brugman, le pieux Thomas à Kempis. Ces "hommes vénérables, nous ne le nierons pas, gémirent sur les "désordres du clergé et des fidèles; ils essayèrent de porter remède "à cette malheureuse situation par leur écrits et par la prédication si "efficace d'une vie austère et fervente; mais jamais il ne put venir à "leur pensée de modifier le dogme. Niez la présence réelle de "Jésus-Christ dans le saint sacrement de l'Eucharistie, et dites-nous

"s'il était encore possible à l'auteur de *L'Imitation* d'en écrire le "quatrième livre? Ce livre n'a-t-il pas été composé, comme on l'a "dit des *Visites* de Saint Alphonse, sur le coeur brûlant de Notre "Seigneur? Entre Thomas à Kempis et les novateurs du Protes- "tantisme, il y a un abîme." *

B (pages 94, 101).

One very important incident connected with the history of Thomas à Kempis leads us to believe that the anecdotes which he often relates in his works, as affecting "Quidam frater," or "Quidam "devotus," etc., in reality refer to himself. It is as follows:—

In the nineteenth chapter of the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, which records the death of John Vos van Huesden, Thomas describes a vision, premonitory of the coming event, which he tells us was seen *by one of two of the Brothers from Mount St. Agnes*, who came to Windesheim to consult with John Vos.

Now, we know from the twenty-first chapter of the second book of Busch's *Chronicle of Windesheim*, that the brother referred to *was Thomas à Kempis himself.* The great modesty of the latter did not prevent Busch from distinctly naming him as the subject of the vision, and at the same time adding that he was the author of *The Imitation of Christ.* The similarity of the mode in which à Kempis relates this incident, which undoubtedly occurred to himself, leads us to infer that he, too, was the person in question in many more of the visions, incidents, etc., which are related throughout his works.

C (page 193).

The reader will here find a single chapter of *The Imitation of Christ* studied with reference to its derivation from the Holy Scriptures and the works of St. Bernard. The text adopted is that of Hirsche, with its special punctuation already described, the clivis alone being omitted and replaced by a semicolon. I have taken, at

* Les Dernières Recherches sur l'Auteur de l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ, par Ad. Delvigne, pp. 43, 44. Bruxelles: Alfred Vromant, 1883.

random, the first chapter of the first book: the whole work exhibits a like parallelism in thought and feeling, despite very marked differences in language and mode of expression.

De Imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.

LIBER I.

CAP. I.

I. Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris: *
dicit Dominus.
Haec sunt verba Christi quibus admonemur,
quatenus vitam ejus et mores imitemur:
si velimus veraciter illuminari,
et ab omni caecitate cordis liberari.†
Summum igitur studium nostrum sit:
in vita Jesu Christi meditari.

Doctrina Christi omnes doctrinas sanctorum praecellit;
et qui spiritum haberet:
absconditum ibi manna inveniret.‡
Sed contingit quod multi ex frequenti auditu evangelii parvum desiderium sentiunt:
quia spiritum Christi non habent.§
Qui autem vult plene et sapide Christi verba intelligere:
oportet ut totam vitam suam illi studeat conformare.

II. Quid prodest tibi alta de Trinitate disputare;
si careas humilitate unde displiceas Trinitati?
Vere alta verba non faciunt sanctum et justum:
sed virtuosa vita efficit Deo carum.
Opto magis sentire compunctionem:
quam scire ejus definitionem.
Si scires totam bibliam exterius et omnium philosophorum dicta;
quid totum prodesset sine caritate Dei et gratia? ‖
Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas: ¶
praeter amare Deum et illi soli servire.**

* Joan. viii. 12. † Eph. iv. 18. ‡ Apoc. ii. 17.
§ Rom. viii. 9. ‖ 1 Cor. xiii. 2. ¶ Eccles. i. 2.
** Deut. vi. 13; x. 20; Matt. iv. 10; Luc. iv. 8.

Ista est summa sapientia :
per contemptum mundi tendere ad regna caelestia.
Vanitas igitur est divitias perituras quaerere :
et in illis sperare.*
Vanitas quoque est honores ambire :
et in altum statum se extollere.
Vanitas est carnis desideria sequi : †
et illud desiderare unde postmodum graviter oportet puniri.
Vanitas est longam vitam optare :
et de bona vita parum curare.‡
Vanitas est praesentem vitam solum attendere :
et quae futura sunt non praevidere.§
Vanitas est diligere quod cum omni celeritate transit : ||
et illic non festinare ubi sempiternum gaudium manet.

Memento illius frequenter proverbii ;
quia non satiatur oculus visu : ¶
nec auris impletur auditu.
Stude ergo cor tuum ab amore visibilium abstrahere :
et ad invisibilia te transferre.
Nam sequentes suam sensualitatem maculant conscientiam :
et perdunt Dei gratiam.

Extracts from St. Bernard, showing the parallelism between his writings and the foregoing chapter of "The Imitation of Christ." The edition of St. Bernard's Works referred to is that of Dom Mabillon, published in Paris by Gaume Brothers, 1839.

"*Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris* :
"*dicit Dominus.*
"*Haec sunt verba Christi quibus admonemur,*
"*quatenus vitam ejus et mores imitemur :*
"*si velimus veraciter illuminari,*
"*et ab omni caecitate cordis liberari.*"

* Eccles. ii. 1, 4–12 ; v. 9. † Gal. v. 16. ‡ Eccles. vi. 3, 4.
§ Eccles. xi. 8. || Eccles. ii. 11. ¶ Eccles. i. 8.

St. Bernard :

"Si imitaris eum, non ambulas in tenebris, sed habebis lumen "vitae." *

"Deargentemus ergo pennas nostras in Christi conversatione. . . . "Imitemur, quoad possumus, eum qui sic dilexit paupertatem," etc. †

"Ad sequendum autem te, Domine Jesu, vix inveniuntur, qui vel "trahi patiantur, qui velint duci per viam mandatorum tuorum. . . . "Beatus qui ubique te ducem habet, Domine Jesu. . . . Nos autem "populus tuus, et oves pascuae tuae, sequamur te, per te, ad te : quia "tu es via, veritas, et vita." ‡

"Propterea sequere, anima mea, et in hac ascensione Christum "Dominum, ut sub te sit appetitus tuus, et tu domineris illius . . . "calcando carnalia desideria. . . . Sequere etiam ascendentem in "crucem, exaltatum a terra : ut non solum super te, sed et super "omnem quoque mundum mentis fastidio colloceris, universa quae "in terris sunt deorsum aspiciens et despiciens." §

"Sequamur, fratres, sequamur Agnum quocumque ierit : sequamur "patientem, sequamur et resurgentem. . . . Crucifigatur vetus homo "noster simul cum illo, ut destruatur corpus peccati." ||

"Placebitne tibi, Domine Jesu, ut dones mihi vitam tuam, sicut "dedisti conceptionem ? . . . Non solum, ait, conceptionem meam, "sed et vitam meam. . . . Hoc autem . . . ut . . . vita mea in- "struat tuam. . . . Sic enim plane videbis et viam per quam ambules ; "et cautelam qua ambules, et ad quam ambules mansionem. In vita "mea cognosces viam tuam, ut sicut ego paupertatis et obedientiae, "humilitatis et patientiae, charitatis et misericordiae indeclinabiles "semitas tenui ; sic et tu eisdem vestigiis incedas." ¶

"Nunc vero . . . magis illud mihi postulare videtur, ut conver- "sationis ejus valeat vestigia sequi, ut possit aemulari virtutem, et "normam tenere vitae, et morum queat apprehendere disciplinam. In "his quippe maxime opus est adjutorio, quo valeat abnegare semetipsam, "et tollere crucem suam, et sic sequi Christum. . . . Sic itaque et "dilecta tua, relictis omnibus propter te, concupiscit semper ire post

* De Humilitate, cap. i. 1, Opp. tom. ii. p. 1282.
† De Adventu Domini, Serm. iv. 7, Opp. tom. iii. p. 1657.
‡ In Ascensione Domini, Serm. ii. 6, Opp. tom. iii. p. 1990.
§ Ibid., Serm. iv. 12, 13, Opp. tom. iii. pp. 2004, 2005.
|| Ibid., Serm. v. 3, Opp. tom. iii. p. 2006, 2007.
¶ In Festo Pentecostes, Serm. ii. 5, Opp. tom. ii. p. 2021.

"te, semper tuis inhaerere vestigiis, ac sequi te quocumque ieris: "sciens quoniam viae tuae viae pulchrae et omnes semitae tuae "pacificae; et quia qui sequitur te, non ambulat in tenebris." *

". . . Merito igitur eum sequuntur etiam in hac vita virginitate "cordis et carnis, quocumque ierit. Quid est enim sequi, nisi imitari? "quia *Christus passus est pro nobis, relinquens vobis exemplum*, sicut ait "Apostolus Petrus, *ut sequamini vestigia ejus*. . . . Caveant autem "virgines Christi, ne pueriliter intelligant: ita ut solam virginitatem "credant sibi sufficere ad sequendum Agnum Dei, quocumque ierit; "cum ipse Agnus non solum virginitatis semitam, imo etiam omnium "virtutum viam incedat. Oportet ergo virginem Christi omnium "virtutum itinere, etiam in hac vita, Agnum mansuetissimum imitari; "si vult illuc venire, ubi sine fine eum, quocumque ierit, sequetur. ". . . Ambulat in omni via omnium virtutum Agnus: ambulet sic et "virgo cupiens Agnum imitari." †

"Qui enim tanquam membrum Christi dicit se in Christo manere, "debet sicut ille ambulavit, et ipse ambulare." ‡

"*Ecce nos reliquimus omnia et secuti sumus te.* Verae conversionis "exemplum nobis hoc proponitur admirandum et imitandum. Necesse "est enim ut verae professor religionis omnia relinquat, et Christum "sequatur. Et quidem beatus qui sic relinquit omnia, ut eum "sequatur in quo sunt omnia." §

"In omnibus virtutibus et bonis moribus, semper propone tibi "illud praeclarissimum speculum sanctitatis, et perfectissimum ex- "emplum: scilicet vitam et mortem Filii Dei et Domini nostri Jesu "Christi, qui de coelo ad hoc missus est, ut nobis praeiret in via "virtutum, et legem vitae et disciplinae suo nobis exemplo daret, et "erudiret nos sicut semetipsum. Sicut enim naturaliter ad imaginem "Dei creati sumus; ita ad morum ejus similitudinem pro nostra possi- "bilitate conformemur; qui ejus imaginem peccato foedavimus. "Quanto enim quilibet se virtutum imitatione conformare Christo "studuerit: tanto ei propinquior in patria, et similior in gloriae "claritate erit. Describe in corde tuo mores ejus: quam humiliter "se habuerit inter homines," etc. ‖

* In Cantica, Serm. xxi. 2, 3, Opp. tom. iv. pp. 2778, 2779.

† Vitis Mystica, seu tractatus de Passione Domini, cap. xxxi. 108, 109, Opp. tom. v. pp. 947, 948.

‡ Serm. in Cœna Domini, 5, Opp. tom. v. p. 1277.

§ Serm. in Verba Evangelii: Matt. cap. xix. 27, Opp. tom. v. p. 1532.

‖ Opusculum *Ad Quid Venisti?* xxiv., Opp. tom. v. p. 1622.

"Ambula sicut ille ambulavit: sequere exemplum ejus, imitare "vestigia illius. . . . Ambula per viam qua praecessit Jesus Christus "sponsus tuus, et passibus indefessis sequere coelestem ducem. "Sine dubio, si consecuta fueris, cum ipso in coelo regnabis." *

"*Summum igitur studium nostrum sit:*
"*in vita Jesu Christi meditari.*"

St. Bernard:

"Vita Christi, vivendi mihi regula exstitit: mors, a morte re- "demptio. Illa vitam instruxit, mortem ista destruxit." †

"Da mihi igitur, optime Jesu, te diligere, et indesinenter meditari "de te." ‡

"*Ista est summa sapientia:*
"*per contemptum mundi tendere ad regna caelestia.*"

St. Bernard:

"Vides ergo quia vane conturbatur omnis homo. . . . Prudens "ergo negotiator, qui videt in divitiis laborem, in honoribus poenam, "invidiam in gloria, facit sarcinam suam, mundi contemptum: et "fugit." §

"Relege maximum illum latinorum philosophorum [Senecam], et "in illius verbis meam invenies sententiam. Contemne igitur haec "omnia contemptibilia; et de his omnibus fac sarcinam tuam, con- "temptum mundi." ‖

"Sancti viri qui perfecte saeculum contemnunt, ita huic mundo "moriuntur, ut soli Deo vivere delectentur. . . . Ergo ille est per- "fectus qui mente et corpore a saeculo est elongatus. . . . Qui "perfecte mundum despiciunt, adversa vitae nostrae appetunt, et "prospera contemnunt, et dum ab eis vita haec contemnitur, coelestis "invenitur." ¶

* De Modo Bene Vivendi, xxxix., xlvi., Opp. tom. v. pp. 1703, 1712.

† Exhortatio ad Milites Templi, cap. xi. 18, Opp. tom. ii. p. 1268.

‡ De Charitate, cap. xxxiv. 103, Opp. tom. v. p. 862.

§ De Diversis, Serm. xlii. 3, Opp. tom. iii. p. 2460.

‖ Serm. Nicolai Clarae-Vallensis de S. Nicolao Myrensi Episcopo, 4, S. Bernardi Opp. tom. v. p. 1418.

¶ De Modo Bene Vivendi, vii. 19, Opp. tom. v. p. 1639.

"Unde valde bonum est nobis, omnia terrena propter nomen "Domini relinquere, ut ab eo possimus coelestia accipere. . . . "Felicitas hujus mundi brevis est. Modica est hujus saeculi gloria, "caduca est, et fragilis temporalis potentia. Igitur, . . . ut acquirere "possis coelestes divitias, contemne terrenas: libenter despice "terrena, ut possis pervenire ad coelestia bona. Respue transitoria, "ut habere merearis aeterna." *

"Nil tuum dixeris, quod potes perdere;
"Quod mundus tribuit, intendit rapere.
"Superna cogita, cor sit in aethere:
"Felix qui potuit mundum contemnere." †

"Vanitas igitur est divitias perituras quaerere:
"et in illis sperare."

St. Bernard:

"Filii Adam, genus avarum et ambitiosum, audite. Quid vobis "cum terrenis divitiis et gloria temporali, quae nec verae, nec vestrae "sunt? Aurum et argentum nonne terra est rubra et alba, quam "solus hominum error facit, aut magis reputat pretiosam? Denique "si vestra sunt haec, tollite ea vobiscum. Sed homo cum interierit, "non sumet omnia; neque descendet cum eo gloria ejus." ‡

"Vide quantum laborem pro perituris divitiis assumpsisti. Transis "maria, et alium tibi orbem aperis navigando," etc.§

"Nudi nascimur in hac vita, nudi exituri sumus de hac vita: cur "ergo concupiscimus terrena et transitoria? Si ergo bona hujus "mundi credimus peritura, cur tanto amore diligimus ea?" ||

"Vanitas quoque est honores ambire:
"et in altum statum se extollere."

St. Bernard:

"Videas et homines pecuniosos ad honores quosque eccle- "siasticos pervolare; moxque sibi applaudere sanctitatem, vestium

* De Modo Bene Vivendi, viii. 22–24, Opp. tom. v. pp. 1641–1643.
† Rhythmus de Contemptu Mundi, Opp. tom. v. p. 1772.
‡ De Adventu Domini, Serm. iv. 1, 2, Opp. tom. iii. p. 1654.
§ De Diversis, Serm. xlii. 3, Opp. tom. iii. p. 2459.
|| De Modo Bene Vivendi, xlv. 109, Opp. tom. v. p. 1711.

"duntaxat mutatione, non mentium; et dignos se aestimare dignitate, "ad quam ambiendo pervenerunt; quodque (si audeo dicere) adepti "sunt nummis, attribuere meritis. Omitto autem de his quos "excaecat ambitio, et honor ipse superbiendi eis materia est." *

"Audi quae dico: quamvis homo in gloria saeculi fulgeat, "quamvis purpura et auro vestitus sit, . . . semper est in poena, "semper est in angustia, semper est in luctu, semper est in periculo: ". . . sed infirmus in lectis argenteis cubat, sed fragilis in pluma "jacet, tamen fragilis et mortalis est. . . . Ideo haec dixi tibi, ut "cognoscas quam vana est gloria hujus mundi." †

"Tot clari proceres, tot retro spatia,
"Tot ora praesulum, tot regna fortia;
"Tot mundi principes, tanta potentia,
"In ictu oculi clauduntur omnia.
* * * * *
"O esca vermium! O massa pulveris!
"O roris vanitas, cur sic extolleris?
* * * * *
"Haec carnis gloria, quae magni penditur,
"Sacris in Litteris flos feni dicitur:
"Ut leve folium, quod vento rapitur,
"Sic vita hominis luci subtrahitur." ‡

"O vanitatum vanitas,
"Curarum occupatio!
"O cur ambitur dignitas?
"Cur opum cumulatio?
* * * * *
"Cum sit omnis homo fenum,
"Et post fenum fiat coenum,
"Utquid, homo, extolleris?
"Cerne quid es, et quid eris.
"Modo flos es, et verteris
"In favillam cineris." §

* Super *Missus Est*, Homilia iv. 9, Opp. tom. iii. p. 1703.
† De Modo Bene Vivendi, viii. 24, Opp. tom. v. pp. 1642, 1643.
‡ Rhythmus de Contemptu Mundi, Opp. tom. v. p. 1772.
§ Ibid., Opp. tom. v. pp. 1773, 1774.

"*Vanitas est carnis desideria sequi:*
"*et illud desiderare unde postmodum graviter oportet puniri.*"

St. Bernard:

"Insanus siquidem labor pascere sterilem quae non parit, et "viduae benefacere nolle: omittere curam cordis, et curam carnis "agere in desiderio: impinguare et fovere cadaver putridum, quod "paulo post vermium esca futurum nullatenus dubitatur." *

"Noli attendere quid caro velit, sed quid spiritus poscit. . . . "Si vero dicis, Durus est hic sermo; non possum mundum spernere, "et carnem meam odio habere: dic mihi, ubi sunt amatores mundi, "qui ante pauca tempora nobiscum erant? Nihil ex eis remansit, "nisi cineres et vermes. Attende diligenter quid sunt, vel quid "fuerunt. Homines fuerunt sicut tu: comederunt, biberunt, riserunt, "duxerunt in bonis dies suos; et in puncto ad inferna descenderunt. "Hic caro eorum vermibus, et illic anima ignibus deputatur. . . . "Quid profuit illis inanis gloria, brevis laetitia, mundi potentia, carnis "voluptas, falsae divitiae, magna familia, et mala concupiscentia? "Ubi risus, ubi jocus, ubi jactantia, ubi arrogantia? De tanta "laetitia, quanta tristitia! Post tantillam voluptatem, quam gravis "miseria! De illa exsultatione ceciderunt in magnam miseriam, in "grandem ruinam, et in magna tormenta." †

"Quam breve festum est, haec mundi gloria!
"Ut umbra hominis, sunt ejus gaudia,
"Quae semper subtrahunt aeterna praemia,
"Et ducunt homines ad dura devia." ‡

"Dic, homo, cur abuteris
"Discretionis gratia?
"Cur vitae viam deseris,
"Et tendis ad supplicia?" §

* Serm. de Conversione, cap. viii. 15, Opp. tom. ii. p. 1145.
† Meditationes Piissimae, cap. iii. 9, Opp. tom. v. p. 669.
‡ Rhythmus de Contemptu Mundi, Opp. tom. v. p. 1772.
§ Ibid., Opp. tom. v. p. 1773.

D (page 299).

THERE are several accounts, more or less complete, of the exhumation of the relics of Thomas à Kempis, to which I may refer those who desire full information upon this subject.

One is to be found at pp. 409, 410, vol. ii., of the *Thesaurus Ecclesiasticae Antiquitatis*, Joanne Bollando, S.J. (Venetiis et Antwerpiae : 1749). This work may be seen in the library of Trinity College, Dublin (FF. bb. 28–30). Amort, in his *Deductio Critica*, pp. 322–326, gives the substance of the foregoing. Mooren, in his *Nachrichten über Thomas à Kempis*, devotes ten pages (247–257) to the same topic. The most complete history of the event is that found in a pamphlet which was published about 1872, a copy of which was given to me by the late Pastoor Roelofs, of Zwolle. It is entitled, *De tweehonderdjarige gedenkdag der terugvinding van het gebeente van den Godvruchtigen Thomas à Kempis*, and was printed by P. J. Van Spijk, Zwolle. The occasion upon which this brochure of fourteen pages appeared was the two-hundredth anniversary of the finding of the relics, when the Pastoor Roelofs exposed them to public view for the edification of the inhabitants of Zwolle. From these sources I have ascertained the facts which I now set forth in the following short account.

About the close of the sixteenth century, during the darkest epoch of the anti-Catholic persecution which ravaged Holland, the Convent of Mount St. Agnes was utterly demolished, and its inhabitants driven forth. So complete was its destruction that even of its church not one stone remained upon another. Still, a very clear tradition lingered amongst the clergy of Zwolle, who had known the Canons Regular before their expulsion, as to the exact resting-place of the holy monk whose writings had immortalized the locality, spread far and near, and profoundly edified Christendom.

He was buried, as we find from the *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, in the eastern cloister of the church, near to Peter Herbort and Gerard Cortbeen (see *Chronicle of Mount St. Agnes*, pp. 134–137). The *exact* site of his grave was known to be seven feet from the choir door, measured eastward.

The chain of witnesses through whom this information came down appears unbroken and perfectly trustworthy.

John van Waeyer, Pastoor at Zwolle in 1607, had known Prior Focking, the last Superior of Mount St. Agnes, and had witnessed the demolition of the monastery. He was succeeded by Volquerus Herckinga, who again was succeeded, in 1631, by Arnold van Waeyer, nephew of the above-mentioned John van Waeyer. Arnold van Waeyer was Pastoor at Zwolle in 1672, and had preserved with conscientious minuteness all the information handed down by his predecessors.

The project of recovering the relics of Thomas à Kempis had often been mooted, but was not attempted, owing to the fear of rekindling the persecution of the Catholics. However, in the year 1672, two hundred and one years after the death of à Kempis, an event occurred which rendered the attempt feasible. On the 23rd of June in that year Zwolle was taken and entered by Maximilian Hendrick, Elector of Cologne, and Bernard van Galen, Bishop of Munster. Immediately afterwards the Elector determined to search for the precious remains, and for this purpose sought the aid of Arnold van Waeyer.

On the 11th of the following July, Maximilian, accompanied by few horsemen, visited the site of the old monastery, and on the 13th the Pastoor van Waeyer, accompanied by the Elector's Commissioner, Dr. Meringh, made a similar expedition. Forthwith orders were given, and a body of labourers was sent out to clear away the *débris* of the ruined church, and search for Thomas's grave.

On the 10th of August the gravediggers had already neared the object of their quest, and Arnold van Waeyer, utilizing all the accurate details in his possession, indicated the exact spot, saying, "If you find not the relics here, then further search is useless." But the search was not in vain. At the very spot pointed out, the coffin of the great Thomas à Kempis was discovered.

Awaiting the Elector's orders nothing was disturbed. When all was reported to his Serene Highness, he commanded two mounted soldiers to proceed to Mount St. Agnes to guard the place. Finally, on the 13th of August the coffin was opened, and the bones of the holy man exposed to view. The remains were in wonderful preservation, and the bones of the skeleton attached and *in situ*. The head was nearly perfect, and rested on a mass of peat. The teeth were white, those in the upper maxilla being present, but on being

touched they fell from the sockets. The lower jaw retained only a few of the teeth. The right side of the skeleton lay somewhat lower than the left, and had mouldered considerably. The hands were crossed, the right lying upon the left. The bones of the fingers and toes were intact, but the ribs and shoulder-blades had crumbled to dust. The stole, made of white satin and embroidered with flowers, lay around his neck, the lower part being quite consumed. The portion which had escaped destruction was taken by the Elector as a relic. From the inner aspect of the left ankle an abundance of beautiful coloured flowers were found growing—doubtless a variety of lichen.

Many circumstances combine to identify these remains, and lead to the conviction that they undoubtedly were those of Thomas à Kempis. In the first place, they were discovered in the exact spot, without a hairbreadth's deviation, which was known to be the site of his grave; and the cranium was found to bear the closest possible resemblance to the authentic portrait, then in the possession of the Pastoor van Waeyer. The other two brothers interred in that portion of the eastern cloister were Peter Herbort and Gerard Cortbeen. The skeleton of the former, who was extremely fragile and delicate, had entirely crumbled to dust; while that of the latter indicated a tall and powerful man, which à Kempis was not. I may add, from my own observations, that the skull strongly resembles in formation the head in the two portraits of à Kempis which still exist, and of which I give copies in autotype—namely, the Zwolle portrait (which formerly belonged to the Pastoor van Waeyer) and the Gertruidenberg picture. Moreover, the density of the bones, and appearance of the cranial sutures, indicate that they were those of a very aged man.

The skeleton having been dismembered, in presence of the Pastoor van Waeyer, and of two Fathers of the Canons Regular—namely, Francis Corlui and Caspar Everard Schrick—the precious relics were placed upon a bier and conveyed in solemn procession to Zwolle. There the Elector in person confided them to the Pastoor van Waeyer, to be placed in his chapel of St. Joseph, in the Spiegel Steeg, strictly enjoining him never to part with them. He further directed a handsome reliquary to be made for their safe custody. In this receptacle they were deposited on June 29, 1674, and remain to this day.

Vigorous efforts were soon made by the Canons Regular of Groenendaal, and of Cologne, to obtain possession of the relics, on the pretext of greater safety; but van Waeyer would never consent to their removal from Zwolle.

In the year 1809, owing to the dilapidated condition of the chapel of St. Joseph, it was found necessary to remove the reliquary with its contents, whereupon they were conveyed to the sacristy of the church of St. Michael, in the Nieuw Straat, where I saw them, under the care and guardianship of the parish priest, the Pastoor George Roelofs.

E (page 306).

The grounds upon which I have arrived at the conclusion that Thomas à Kempis stood at least five feet six inches in height are as follows. It is well known to anatomists that the length of the femur, measured by a line extending from the head of the bone to the internal condyle, bears a close relation to the stature of the individual. This proportion is expressed after various methods, but according to the high authority of my friend, Dr. Alexander Macalister, Professor of Anatomy in the University of Cambridge, it can best be formulated, for males of moderate stature among European nations, as 27·4 : 100.

Now on measuring the thighbone of à Kempis, I found that it equalled eighteen inches. The foregoing data give us the following proportion :—

$$27{\cdot}4 : 100 :: 18 : x.$$

The result amounts to 65·69 inches, or, in round numbers, five feet five inches and seven-tenths. The additional height gained by the soles of the shoes makes up the total to something over five feet six inches.

On reading the account of the exhumation, as attested by the Pastoor Arnold van Waeyer, I was surprised and puzzled to find that he states that the skeleton measured three fingers' breadth less than six feet, *the middle height of man!* His words are :—"inventus est "mediocri hominis statura minor, scilicet tribus digitis infra sex "pedes." To solve this difficulty I have sought and obtained full information concerning the measurement of the foot and finger

breadth (*pes* and *digitus*) in Holland in the seventeenth century. The result clears up the question raised by the Pastoor's words.

The old "Dutch" foot varied considerably in length in different parts of Holland, being for the most part less than the English analogue, and in only one district (that of Rotterdam) exceeding it. The *digitus* was, so far as can be ascertained, the twelfth part of the *pes*. From hence we are led to the conclusion that when van Waeyer speaks of six feet as *the middle height* of man, the foot in question was less than our measure.

I am indebted to "The Universal Knowledge and Information "Office," 19, Southampton Street, Bloomsbury Square, London, for these curious details of varying measurements as they existed over two hundred years ago. This Institution, which in many instances has proved itself invaluable to me, by the aid of its able staff, presided over by Lord Truro, places at the disposal of the public, for a nominal fee, all works of reference, and the treasures of the valuable libraries and museums of the Metropolis.

NOTE.

(*Referred to at page* 176.)

SINCE the foregoing essay was in type I have seen a beautiful little volume, published under the title of *The Lesser Imitation* (London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1887). It is a collection of various writings of Thomas à Kempis, selected from his ascetical works, and affords English readers an opportunity for observing the similarity in thought and feeling between them and *The Imitation of Christ*.

I may also observe that many works of à Kempis may be found in English—such as, *The Valley of Lilies*, *The Three Tabernacles*, some of *The Meditations*, *The Treatise on True Compunction*, etc.; all of which appear under the title of *The Christian Traveller* (Dublin: Duffy & Sons); *The Little Garden of Roses*, by the same publishers; *The Manuale Parvulorum* (Dublin: Gill & Son), and *The Soliloquy of the Soul* (London: Suttaby & Co.). The latter work is greatly altered from the original to suit Anglican readers.

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ALPHABETICAL LIST of a few important places named in the foregoing essay, with references to facilitate their recognition.

Agnetenberg, or Mount St. Agnes	2 miles N.E. of Zwolle (marked in red).
Almelo	22 miles N.E. of Deventer.
Bommel	10 miles N. of Bois-le-Duc.
Buren	about midway between Utrecht and Bois-le-Duc.
Eymsteyn	2 miles N.W. of Dordrecht, in the Island of Ysselmonde. Dordrecht lies 10 miles S.E. of Rotterdam.
Groenendaal	8 miles S.E. of Brussels.
Huesden	9 miles W. and N. of Bois-le-Duc.
Hulsbergen	Near to Hattem, which lies 4 miles S. and W. of Zwolle.
Huxaria	Huxter, in Westphalia.
Kampen, or Campen	8 miles N.W. of Zwolle.
Kempen	17 miles N.W. of Dusseldorf.
Lochem	10 miles E. of Zutphen.
Leyderdam, or Leerdam	15 miles S. of Utrecht.
Lunenkerk	1 mile S.E. of Harlingen in Friesland.
Schoonhoven	15 miles E. and N. of Rotterdam.
Twenthia	One of the divisions of Overyssel.
Vianen	8 miles S. of Utrecht.
Windesheim	4 miles S. of Zwolle (marked in red).

IN PREPARATION.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE PRESENT ESSAY.

A New English Translation of *The Imitation of Christ*, annotated with the intention of showing the sources from which the book is mainly derived—Scriptural, Patristic, Classical, etc.

ALSO,

An English Translation of the nine Spiritual works which follow *The Imitation of Christ* in Thomas à Kempis' autograph MS. of 1441.

The English version will be placed side by side with the Latin text, which has been carefully collated with the original of Thomas à Kempis.

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